10¢

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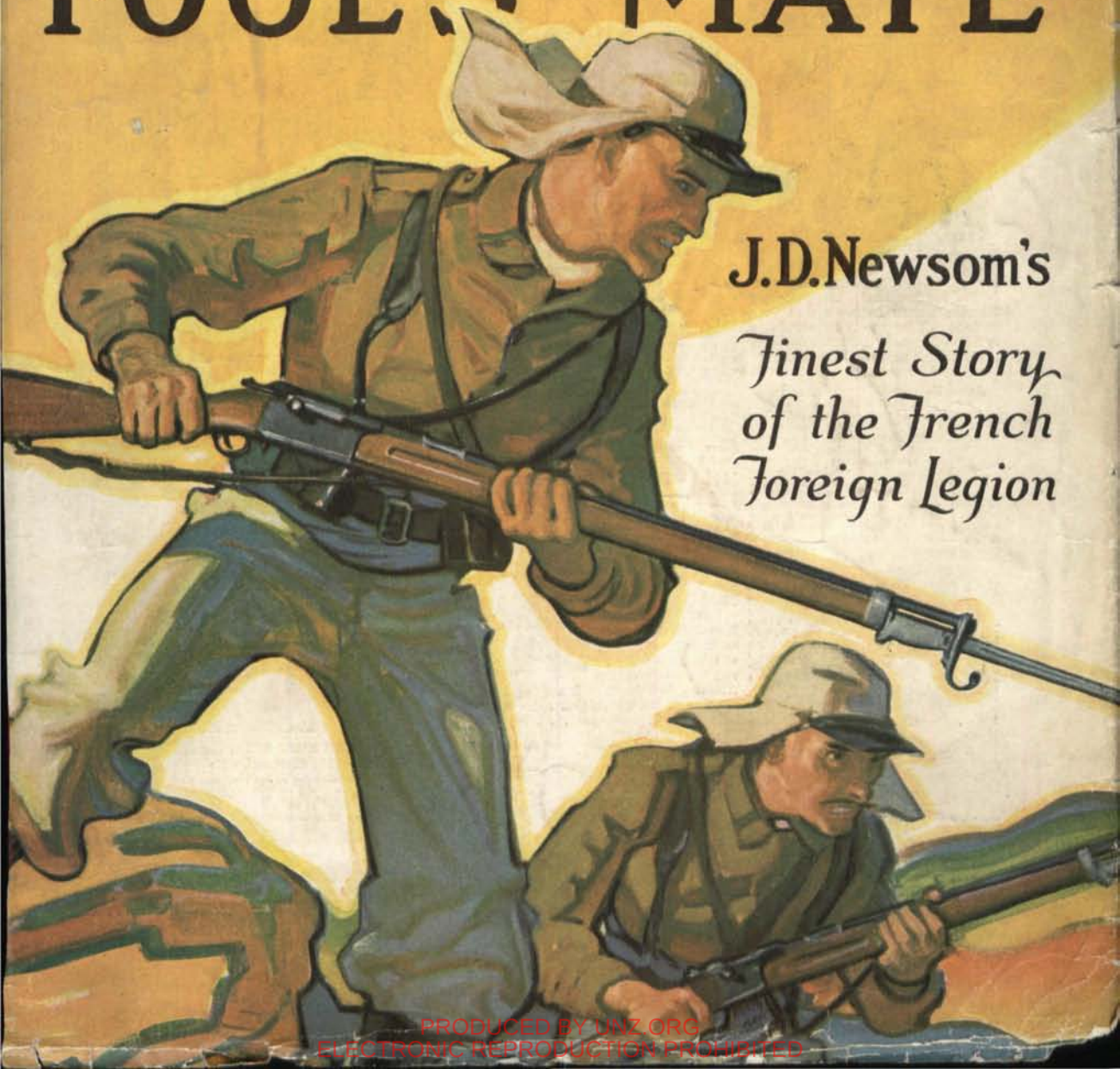
# ARGOSY

NOV. 16 WEEKLY

# FOOL'S MATE



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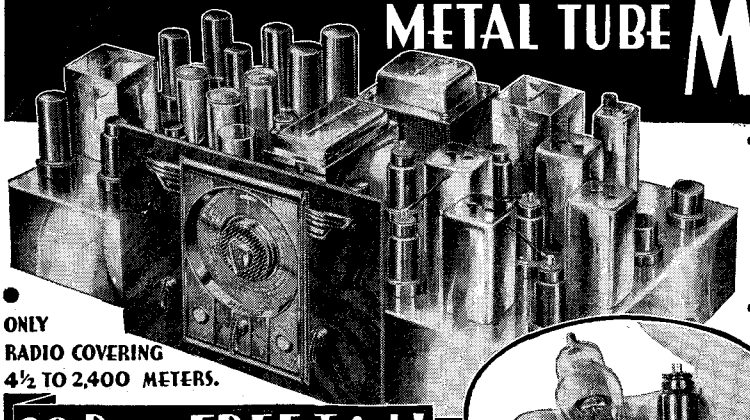
6 TUNING RANGES



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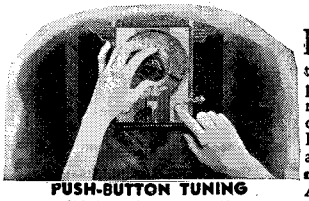

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**TERMS AS LOW AS $5.00 DOWN**

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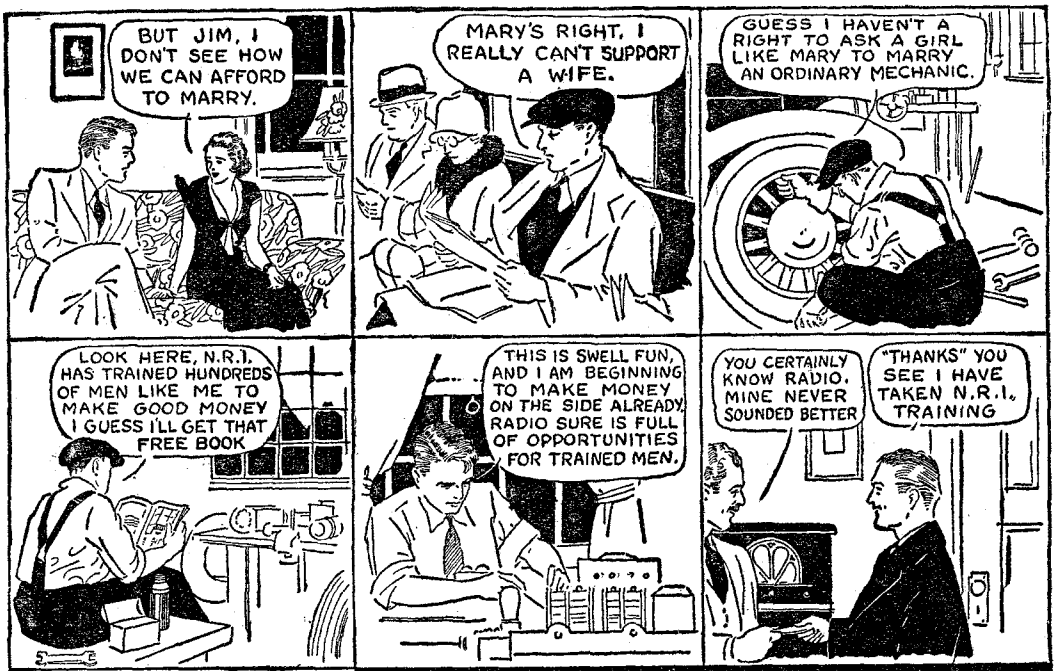
BUT JIM, I DON'T SEE HOW WE CAN AFFORD TO MARRY.
MARY'S RIGHT, I REALLY CAN'T SUPPORT A WIFE.
GUESS I HAVEN'T A RIGHT TO ASK A GIRL LIKE MARY TO MARRY AN ORDINARY MECHANIC.
LOOK HERE, N.R.I. HAS TRAINED HUNDREDS OF MEN LIKE ME TO MAKE GOOD MONEY I GUESS I'LL GET THAT FREE BOOK
THIS IS SWELL FUN, AND I AM BEGINNING TO MAKE MONEY ON THE SIDE ALREADY. RADIO SURE IS FULL OF OPPORTUNITIES FOR TRAINED MEN.
YOU CERTAINLY KNOW RADIO. MINE NEVER SOUNDED BETTER
"THANKS" YOU SEE I HAVE TAKEN N.R.I. TRAINING
OH! JIM, IT'S WONDERFUL. NOW YOU'RE ON THE WAY TO SUCCESS
YES MARY, AND THERE'S A REAL FUTURE FOR US IN THIS RADIO FIELD.

# I'LL TRAIN YOU AT HOME *In Your Spare Time For A* GOOD RADIO JOB

J. E. SMITH, President
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The man who has directed the Home-Study Training of more men for the Radio industry than any other man in America.

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## Many Radio Experts Make $30, $50, $75 a Week

*Why struggle along in a dull job with low pay and no future?* Start training now for the live-wire Radio field. I have helped many men make more money. Hundreds of successful men now in Radio got their start through N. R. I. training.

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# ARGOSY

## Action Stories of Every Variety

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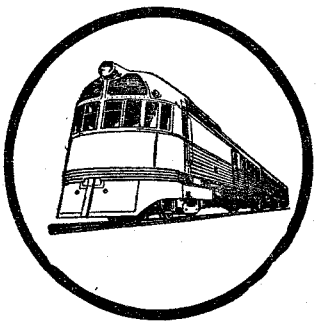

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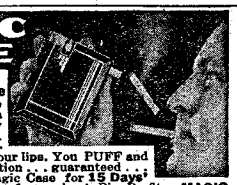

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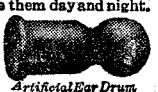

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Dr. C. Z. Rendelle




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# Fool's Mate

By J. D. NEWSOM
Author of "Soldiers of Misfortune," "Grenades for the Colonel," etc.

*An American, an Englishman and a Frenchman, soldiers of the Foreign Legion, are pitted against each other in a feud which officers are powerless to stop*

## CHAPTER I.

### A DRINK TO FREEDOM.

THE Rendez-Vous des Légionnaires was packed to the doors. The superheated air was thick and blue with tobacco smoke. It stank of stale wine fumes and garlic, of cheap perfume and sweat. At the far end of the room a mechanical piano festooned with garlands of red and blue lights was hammering out a ten-year-



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A great deal happened in a short space of time

old fox trot. Hobnailed boots scraped across the sanded floor. There was a vast unending rattle of crockery, a tumult of laughing, singing, cursing voices, punctuated by the girlish squeals of professional entertainers and the apocalyptic crashes of cutlery dumped into the kitchen sink.

Majestic, serene, pompadoured, her sagging jowls coated with violet-tinted powder, Madame Lugnatti surveyed her customers with bulbous, lack-luster eyes. She despised them. They were the scum of the earth, these men of the French Foreign Legion. Not one of them had a clear conscience or a savings fund account. They had cut themselves adrift from their families, their friends, their jobs . . . for what? For five sous a day and the prospect of a violent and painful death.

Murderers, thieves, political refugees, bigamists, misfits and wastrels, that was what they were. Their sun-



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blackened faces, blear-eyed and maudlin, swam at Madame Lugnatti through the blue-gray smoke. They would steal the pennies off a dead man's eyes. They were without decency or morals . . . but it was pay night and their money was pouring into the till of the cash register. A slow, unctuous smile distended her puffy lips as she stared about the room, keeping a close watch on the entertainers and the waiters whom she distrusted only a shade less than she did the Legionnaires.

Her smile grew warmer as her glance came to rest for an instant on her husband, standing, big-bellied and powerful, behind the counter at the serving bar. He knew what Legionnaires wanted! He let them have it. Plenty of noise, a place to dance, women . . . a chance to throw all restraint aside and to act like the wild beasts they really were.

The sky was the limit at the Rendez-Vous so long as the customers paid cash for Lugnatti's adulterated wine, his watery beer, and the fiery *tord-boyaux* which he sold openly despite the police regulations which forbade the sale of spirits to the troops. One drink of that rot-gut and most men were ripe for the back room where they could be relieved of their last few francs before they were pitched out into the alley to be picked up by the town patrol.

But they didn't mind that. They expected nothing else, these graceless swine. Next pay day they would come back, grinning foolishly, ready to match wits with Lugnatti, hoping to cheat him out of the price of a bottle of wine, their pockets full of lead slugs to slip into the mechanical piano.

Scraps of conversation reached Madame Lugnatti above the sound of the music and the rattle of coins in the cash register.

"'Not for me,' I said, 'you can't detail me for your lousy coal-carrying fatigue today,' I said. 'It's against regulations . . .'"

"*Elle est bien balancée, la rouquine . . .*"

". . . heading down the valley toward Figuig when they opened fire. Callona copped one in the lungs. You remember Callona . . ."

"Chief-sergeants are like the rest of us, only they got less brains."

"The one with the jade earrings, *ya doch!* Be careful . . ."

"The finest city in all the world is Budapest. In all the world . . ."

"She said, 'I love him,' so what could I do? I didn't mean to stab him, but when he began to laugh. . . ."

LEGIONNAIRE TOM WEST, a lean and wiry soldier whose sharp-featured countenance was burned a fiery red, pushed his cap onto the back of his close-cropped head and mopped the perspiration off his cheeks with the cuff of his khaki sleeve. He moped very gingerly, for the skin on his nose and cheek bones was peeling in ragged strips.

"If anybody wants to know," he announced, leaning back against the wall and unhooking the collar of his tunic, "you can tell 'em I'm feeling fine. How many have we had? Five bottles apiece? Boy howdy! Ain't that something?" A twinkle crept into his bloodshot gray eyes as he turned toward Robert Milburn. "Say, you sure can put this red ink away," he added with genuine admiration. "I've never seen the beat of it. I'm tighter than a tick, but I'll be doggoned if it's had any effect on you."

Milburn stared at his mug.

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"It hasn't," he confessed. "It's very bad wine, we'll probably suffer abominably in the morning, but I soak it up like a sponge. I was very thirsty." He sighed, stretched out his long legs, and lit a cigarette of *gros blue* which made him cough. "By Jove, I was parched," he went on. "It's a ghastly nuisance, the training and the forming fours and all that sort of thing . . . I mean to say, I didn't know what I was letting myself in for when I enlisted."

West threw back his head and roared with laughter.

"You're better than a three-ring circus. What's eating you now?"

"I am bitterly disappointed, that's all," explained Milburn, who, for a disappointed man, looked astonishingly calm and unperturbed. "Two weeks ago, when I reached Sidi-bel-Abbes, I was teetering, my dear chap, literally teetering on the verge of *delirium tremens*. All the way down from Paris I was pursued by a nasty little King Charles spaniel which no one else seemed to see. Faithful little beast even if he did get underfoot at times and try to trip me up."

"So that's it," hooted West. "Sure! I remember the first day you came wandering into the barrackroom. Was that sergeant mad? He was fit to be tied."

"It was rather trying," Milburn admitted ruefully. "I hadn't had a drink for twenty-four hours and that absurd spaniel was swooping through the air, beating its wings in my face. It had sprouted wings, you know, after we landed at Oran. The climate may have had something to do with it."

"Climate? Is that what you call it? Listen, Bob, you had the swellest hangover I've ever seen on any man."

"Why dwell on such distressing matters? I was resigned to my fate. I thought the spaniel was an omen and all that sort of thing. 'When he leaves me,' I told myself, 'I shall die.' But I didn't, confound it. Next morning the little fellow began to fade away . . ."

"On the drill ground."

"Quite, quite so! I didn't think I'd last out the morning. I was convinced that each step I took would be the last. I wanted to lie down in the dust and expire, but I didn't, damn it! And do you know why? Because . . ."

"Because you knew doggone well you couldn't get away with it, not while the drill instructor was putting you through the hoops. He's a tough egg is Brankovich. Can he make you sweat blood!"

"He can," agreed Milburn. "And the beastly part of the whole thing is that after two weeks of back-breaking, soul-deadening training I feel disgustedly well. I eat like a pig, I sleep like a log, and I am very much afraid that I am going to survive."

"That's just too bad," jeered West. "If you stick around long enough maybe they'll send you to an active service battalion and give you a chance to get shot full of lead."

"WHAT we need," observed Milburn, beckoning a waiter, "is another drink. It's ridiculous what fear will make a man do," he complained. "In England I was full of good resolutions. I swore I'd never touch another drop. Positively! I made up my mind on an average twenty times a day. I was going to reform. I had to! I saw myself slipping but I couldn't stop.

"I had a breakdown two weeks after we started to rehearse 'Cabin Class.' I knew then that I was through.

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I didn't have enough intestinal fortitude to cut my own throat, so I took the night boat to Paris. Next morning I was at the recruiting office."

"What do you mean 'rehearsals'?" inquired West. "Are you an actor?"

A wry smile drew down the corners of West's mouth.

"I was, but the one problem that is bothering me now is: how long will this last? I mean to say, when I enlisted I thought it was only a matter of days before the Legion would be privileged to attend my funeral. And what happens? For the first time in years—years, my dear fellow!—solely because I am overawed by Sergeant Brankovich I have lived and apparently thrived on a diet of clear water, weak coffee and half a litter of ration wine per diem. It is preposterous."

"You're making up for lost time now," West pointed out as the waiter slapped two more bottles onto the table.

"I must. I can't go on like this. Hard work, fresh air, plenty of food, nothing to worry about, no plans to make . . . why, there are times when I'm disgustingly complacent. If I'm not very careful I'm going to like it here."

"And that," admitted West, "is just the way I feel. I've been in this crazy outfit a week longer than you have. Well, sir, I was as sore as a boil when I joined up. I didn't care what happened. You say you made a mess of things . . . you're not alone . . . same here, and how!" He raised his mug to his lips and poured its contents down his throat at one gulp. "Let me tell you . . ."

"Don't tell me anything that can be used as evidence against you when you sober up."

"Nerts! I'm not pickled yet, but I'm going to be before the night's over. Look, you don't know me from a bunch of beets, but we got a long way to go so you might as well know the worst."

He spoke bitterly, making no attempt to minimize his mistakes. At one time, not so long ago, he had been test pilot for one of the leading aircraft manufacturers in America. He had been well satisfied with his hazardous work until one day in Miami he had met a girl by the name of Cornelia Jordan. A week later they had been married.

"And just to show you what kind of a dumbbell I am," he exclaimed, "first time I saw Connie she was in a bathing beauty contest. Can you tie that? I fell for her . . . hard. She was a good looking kid. We got hitched and then the fun began."

He had not been making enough money to suit his wife. She had made him give up his job and go into the bootlegging trade, ferrying Cuban rum from Grand Bahama Island to Florida.

"I coined money for a while. On good days I could make three or four trips with full loads . . ."

But he had been caught in the mist and had cracked up in the Everglades as he tried to land.

"I lost my nerve and I lost my job," he admitted. "I wouldn't fly again, not if you offered me a million bucks. I had concussion. The doctor said 'Take it easy for a while. You're not normal yet, not by any means.' I knew it all right. I used to wake up yelling like a two-year-old, dreaming I was coming down through the fog and the slash-pines suddenly looming up in front of me. I crashed every night for six months straight."

His wife's idea of a perfect rest cure had been to drag him over to Paris

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and to stay up until five o'clock in the morning, dancing with all the gigolos in France.

"She drove me crazy," he declared. "Fight! Say, we fought all the time. Either she walked out on me or I walked out on her. It was fifty-fifty, I guess. So I said to hell with everything and here I am . . . And I'm having the time of my life. Does that make sense?"

"After six bottles of wine almost anything would make sense."

"Maybe, but I was cold sober when I posted that letter this evening after we left barracks. You saw me mail it. Well, sir, that letter was to my wife. I told her where I was and what I'd done: sewed up tight for the next five years. I told her to go home and grab off a divorce. That's sort of final, ain't it? I ought to feel lousy. As a matter of fact I don't."

He picked up his bottle and held it over his mug. Not a drop came out.

"Let's celebrate," he suggested. "Let's drink to something . . . to freedom. By golly, that's it. To freedom. How about a bottle of champagne?"

## CHAPTER II.

HENRI TOXANDRE.

MILBURN was silent for a long moment. It seemed strange that in two weeks' time his point of view should have changed so completely. Try as he might he could not recapture the mood of black despair which had driven him into the Legion. It was as though a door had been slammed shut upon his past.

There was no connecting link between No. 98505, Legionnaire of the Second Class Milburn, Robert, and the Robert Milburn who had once been hailed by theatrical critics as one of the outstanding juvenile leads of the London stage.

He had gone downhill faster than he had gone up. He had taken too many things for granted. He had thrown away opportunity after opportunity until at last even his long suffering agent, Harry Rosenstein, had turned him down.

He remembered all too clearly their final interview.

"What can I do when a contract means nothing to you?" Rosenstein had cried vehemently. "I work myself to the bone getting good parts for you and everybody likes you and the critics praise you and you behave like a maniac. You should have your brain examined once. How long do you think you can keep it up drinking the way you do? This is a profession, my boy. There is plenty of competition, plenty of smart young men treading on your heels . . .

"You can't cut rehearsals because you have an impulse to take orchids to Mabel Dalkeith, even if she is in a nursing home in Glasgow having her tonsils out. No! And you can't call an actor-manager a 'ghastly anthropoidal Othello,' not to his face you can't. And you can't ride onto the stage on a bicycle just because you think the play needs to be speeded up. You drive me out of my mind. You get somebody else to take care of your business, because I won't."

On previous occasions, after such outbursts, he had always relented. This time he had not budged an inch. And the scales had dropped from Milburn's eyes. He had seen himself as he really was. Thirtyish . . . Growing old . . . growing gray . . . slowed down and devitalized by too much whisky which

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blunted his senses and filled him with futile bravado.

In a panic he had dashed off to Paris, with the definite intention of committing suicide after one final well planned meal. The meal had been a great success, but much to his disgust he had not had the courage to put himself out of his misery even though he had absorbed enough Scotch to wreck ten ordinary men.

He had enlisted for the same motives which prompt some people to resort to flagellation: because he despised the strain of weakness in his character, because he wanted to degrade and humiliate his contemptible self. He had succeeded far beyond his expectations. Judged by the standards to which he was accustomed he had been so thoroughly degraded that there seemed to be no depths left for him to plumb.

Privacy had lost all meaning. Overnight he had become a number, a bayonet unit, an automaton drilling to the tap of the drum, arising, eating, going to bed to the tune of braying bugles. Loud-mouthed sergeants had bellowed obscenities in his face; he had been made to scrub floors and muck out stables, to salute haughty little whipper-snappers with a gold stripe on their sleeve; to stand at attention, stiff as a ramrod, whenever one of these strutting little gentlemen deigned to notice his existence.

No one cared whether or not he was on the verge of a complete breakdown. The Legion is accustomed to handling gin-sodden, undernourished, flabby derelicts.

It trains them, or breaks them at top speed.

The days had gone by like lightning. From sun-up till sun-down on a hot and dusty drill ground he had marched and countermarched and double-marched, shouldered arms, presented arms, and ported arms and driven his bayonet into straw stuffed dummies...

AND the strange, the fantastic part of the whole business was that he had enjoyed every minute of it. He felt carefree and light-hearted. The future could take care of itself. The past, with all its uncertainties and frustrations, was unreal and meaningless.

The present alone mattered.

West was right. Here, in the Legion, though it controlled every minute of his life, he had found freedom and release.

"Hey!" West was saying in his staccato, half angry voice. "Have you gone into a trance? I asked you a question. Don't tell me you're passing out."

"Passing out!" echoed Milburn. "Rather not! I'll drink you under the table if that's what you want. Champagne it shall be. We'll drink to the Legion and all its works, what?"

Mireille pursed her paint smeared lips and exhaled a jet of tobacco smoke.

"They are drinking champagne," she pointed out. "The two at the next table. Look, the *patron* in person waits upon them. It is very chic to drink champagne."

Henri Toxandre smiled a superior smile and stroked his well kept beard with the tips of his fingers.

"They are foreigners," he said condescendingly. "I have seen them in barracks. The one with the peeling nose is American, the other is English. They . . ."

"One sees they know how to enjoy life," Mireille broke in, "even," she added acidly, "if they are foreigners.

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There are quite a number of them in the Legion, so I have found."

She turned a jaundiced eye upon the bottle on their table. Legionnaire Toxandre, notwithstanding the charm and the refinement of his manners, was somewhat thrifty. It hurt him to spend two sous. Of course he was amusing, he was gay, he was full of *bon-mots* which made her laugh, and gallant innuendoes which never grew quite stale.

*Bon-mots,* however, buttered no parsnips so far as Mireille was concerned. Her job at the Rendez-Vous was to stimulate the sale of expensive beverages. She worked on a ten per cent commission basis plus a share of the pickings taken from the customers' pockets by the *patron* before he heaved them out the back door.

As a consumer Toxandre was no catch at all. Even when she had accepted his invitation her womanly intuition had warned her that she was being swayed by sloppy sentiment and her worst forebodings had been fully justified. Between eight-thirty and eleven o'clock Toxandre had regaled her with a torrent of spicy anecdotes, blarney, philosophy, history, flattery and dirty stories, but he talked so much and so well that there had been no opportunity to do any serious drinking.

Although Monsieur and Madame Lugnatti had glared balefully at her she had only been able to induce Toxandre to buy one bottle of very bad Sauterne. He had sampled it, called it " a nectar of the most divine," drunk a discreet toast to her " adorable eyes " . . . and gone on to other matters. The bottle was still a third full.

She knew that for the pleasure of her undivided attention most of the Legionnaires in that room would have thrown away three months' back pay in an evening and considered it a privilege worth boasting about until the next pay day rolled around.

THE majority of the soldiers, however, were either Russians or Germans, Poles or Czechs. They were uncouth clods, without tact or finesse, and in her hands they were clay. Toxandre, however, was a horse of a very different color. He was a Parisian to the tips of his fingers.

With disarming insincerity he said all those things which a woman—even an entertainer in a Sidi-bel-Abbes gin-mill—loves to listen to. He made her feel as though she were sixteen and full of charming illusion. He quoted famous authors. Furthermore he had a. regular profile, and his dark eyes glowed like live coals.

His beard, cut short and square, made his jaw look much more rugged than it really was. It gave him a truculent, swashbuckling air which Mireille found entrancing.

She was too old and too wise to have the slightest faith in anything he said. Nevertheless she was quite mad about him. He was France, he was home. She didn't give a damn whether he bought wine or gave her ditch water to drink. Mentally she snapped her fingers at the Lugnattis. They had ceased to count. She asked for nothing but the infinite delight of sitting beside Toxandre and listening to the lilting sound of his voice whispering lies in her ears.

The sight of the champagne bottle on the next table brought her back with a jolt to the dismal world of things as they are. It was a challenge to her femininity, and a threat to her job. And jobs were scarcer than hen's teeth at Sidi-bel-Abbes.

Here were two lone men who, without being urged or influenced in any

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way, after having guzzled vast quantities of red wine, ordered the most expensive champagne on the list! And the best she had been able to accomplish was to foist a bottle of ten-franc Sauterne on Toxandre.

Left to her devices she would have been quite content to drink synthetic lemonade. It made her sad, but she felt compelled to exert herself.

"Me," she said airily, "I adore champagne." She did. No fooling. It cost twenty-five francs a bottle. "Buy me a bottle of champagne, my golden treasure. With you I do not have to make the pretense," she added with a pitiful little smile. "The *patron* will not be content with me unless you spend some money. You should see the anger with which he looks at me. He is suspicious, that one."

"So much the better," swore Toxandre. "You are too pretty, too altogether adorable to be wasting your talents in this foul place. You should be in Paris. You could be famous . . ."

Paris was over the sea and far away. Mireille's interests were more immediate.

"I could name twenty men who would beg, borrow or steal to buy champagne for me. I am not exaggerating, my precious one. I would not lie to you. Just one bottle to pacify the *patron*. I am like everyone else. I must earn my living."

Toxandre shrugged his shoulders with elaborate unconcern. It was nothing to him whether or not she earned her living. If she valued his company, and it was apparent that she did, the least she could do was to make some slight sacrifice.

He wasn't impressed by the mere fact that he had made a hit with her. Women were always throwing themselves at his head. He was used to it. He expected nothing else. But this particular woman was beginning to bore him. She had broken all the rules of the game and fallen in love much too blatantly.

Therefore, according to his code, she was not entitled to expect any favors from him, certainly not champagne. Code or no code he might have weakened (he rather liked her Chinese eyes) but for one major consideration: he had no money left.

He had spent most of his pay at the tailor shop having his tunic adjusted, and after paying for the Sauterne he owned the large sum of one franc and seventy-five centimes which he needed for cigarettes.

"IF your boss annoys you," he said firmly, "refer him to me. I will attend to that blood sucker. One word from me, *ma toute belle*, and the authorities will close his filthy dive. I am only a newcomer to the Legion, that is true, but I have more influence than is usually the case." He lowered his voice to a whisper. "Several officers are known to me personally . . ."

Mireille was not listening. She had heard that yarn before. Every other Legionnaire, sooner or later, gave her to understand that back in his own country he had been a baron or a financier or a famous surgeon. The others boasted of the horrible nature of the crimes they had committed. One thing they all had in common: a vivid imagination.

To force Toxandre's hand she resorted to the age old wiles of her sex. Leaning forward she gazed at the two men at the adjoining table, and when they glanced her way she rewarded them with a bright and promising smile.

"He is good looking that one," she

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reflected aloud . . . almost loud enough to be heard above the appalling din of the mechanical piano. "He has the head of a *mylord,* so distinguished and so cold. He is no fool that one. And the other, is he not droll when he laughs? They are enjoying life. They are not afraid to spend their money."

Toxandre fidgetted uneasily. He despised the girl. He understood exactly why she was resorting to such tactics. But now that there was some slight risk of losing her he felt compelled to assert himself.

He had no money, but he had brains which, he would have been the first to admit, were worth their weight in gold. In ten seconds he had a scheme worked out down to the last detail.

"We are going to drink champagne," he promised Mireille, "but," he added with a sly wink, "our good Anglo-Saxon friends are going to buy it for us."

"But," she protested, "I do not want to leave you, my cabbage. Is it that you desire to be rid of me?"

"Never!" lied Toxandre. "Of course not. But they will buy the champagne. We shall drink it, and your *patron* will appreciate your services. Everyone, in fine, will be satisfied."

The plan appealed to her simple, mercenary soul.

"Wait a little," he advised, "and I will show you how it is done without pain or effort."

## CHAPTER III.

### DOUBLE-CROSSED.

HE touched West's elbow.

"Forgive me," he said in fluent but strongly accented English. "I hear you talk. It gives me much joy to hear what you say about the Legion. May I drink with you?" He raised his glass. There were six drops clinging to the bottom. "To freedom! Comrades, I salute you."

It worked. In five minutes they were all gathered around the same table and the *patron,* his sallow face wreathed in smiles, was uncorking a second bottle.

Milburn paid for it, throwing a hundred franc note onto the table with a careless negligence which made Toxandre bilious with envy.

"One sees," he said gayly, "that you are different. You are a gentleman. That is one thing I have missed since I have been in the Legion: the company of my intellectual equals. Our roommates are splendid soldiers, but they have no conversation, no what-is-it, no cultivation. That is why," he added, casting a sidelong glance at Mireille who knew but two words of English, both of them unmentionable, "you find me in such company. One seeks to distract oneself."

The girl by that time not only bored him, but exasperated him. Her devotion was much too obvious. It made him feel a trifle foolish. More than once, in their very bad French, Milburn and West had tried to talk to her, but she made no attempt to be bright and amusing. All that she could do, now that she no longer had to worry about financial matters, was to sit and ogle Toxandre and paw at his arm.

"A happy encounter," he went on, edging away from her. "We shall be good companions, is it not so? Before long I shall be a corporal." He cleared his throat and tried not to look too complacent. "That has been told to me in the strictest confidence by Captain Bouvier. I shall ask to have you transferred to my squad."

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"Awfully jolly of you to suggest it and all that sort of thing," drawled Milburn, "but don't go to any trouble on my account. I mean to say, life, you know . . . full of hazards . . . full of pitfalls. Our best intentions come to naught. Really they do."

Much to Toxandre's surprise West burst into loud guffaws and dug his fist into Milburn's ribs, exclaiming:

"Poker-face, I thought the English had no sense of humor. You're okay, boy. Keep up the good work."

"But it will be no trouble at all," Toxandre broke in. "I am on terms of the most intimate with Captain Bouvier, a very distinguished officer. Only yesterday he said, 'Toxandre, there is nothing to stop a man of your caliber from climbing to the topmost echelon of the military hierarchy. You are wasted in the ranks. You must be sent to the corporal's training squad without delay.'"

Milburn half raised himself off the bench and said: "We are honored to have in our midst such a distinguished member of the Foreign Legion. I trust that you carry an adequate supply of mothballs in your haversack to protect your marshal's baton."

The humorous intent of this remark was so obvious that Toxandre gave a polite snicker.

"I am not yet distinguished," he said modestly. "Some day perhaps . . ."

"Come, come," protested Milburn. "My dear fellow, you consort with captains, you entertain ravishing maidens, you are about to be promoted. Of course you are distinguished."

Toxandre dismissed these remarks with a slight shrug. He could not talk about himself in this light and jocular fashion.

He shot a quick glance at Milburn, wondering whether he had detected a note of sarcasm in this Englishman's tone. But he could not be sure. Milburn's control over his facial muscles was positively disconcerting.

"Some day," Toxandre persisted, "I hope to assert myself, that is true. The Legion is my life now. My ambition is . . ."

"To the corporal and his ambition," cried West, raising his mug high above his head. "Mademoiselle from Armenteers, let us drink to the ambition of our friend, our fellow Legionnaire, our future general. What's the name? Toxandre? Long may he wave!"

MIREILLE didn't pretend to know what he was shouting about. But she was only too glad to clink glasses with her little golden cabbage and to remind him of her existence.

"Your good health, my treasure," she gushed.

The fervor with which she gazed into his eyes made him grit his teeth. He was beginning to loathe her. Here he was, doing his best to create a favorable impression on these moneyed Legionnaires, and this withered harpy, this paint-smeared Jezebel refused to leave him alone.

"I must get rid of her," he decided. "One can never tell. I may need these men. I do not need her at all."

Just then the *patron* hove in sight, clasping another bottle in his fat and tattooed arms.

"And after this one," swore West, dragging a fistful of notes from his pocket, "I'm going to call it a day. I'm beginning to double, by heck! Two beards, two girls, two of everything. How about it, Bob, fellow souse? About time to quit, ain't it?"

"Time and high time," nodded Mil-

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burn, "unless you would like to be picked up by the town patrol and wake up tomorrow morning in the guard-room. By Jove, it might be a novel experience, what? Haven't been there yet."

"No!" protested Toxandre, dismayed at the possibility that they might walk out before he had a chance to make sure they would not forget him. "No, *mes amis!* Not the guard room. That is bad. Legionnaires like ourselves must observe the law and set the good example for the less fortunate."

"You talk like a tract," said West. "You don't belong to the League for the Uplift of Fallen Legionnaires, do you?"

"Of course not," said Milburn before Toxandre could open his mouth. "He's a charter member of the Society for the Protection of Potential Generals. My dear chap, your ignorance astounds me. You must have heard of the S. P. P. G. All the best people belong."

A harassed look crept into Toxandre's eye. This so-called Anglo-Saxon humor baffled him. He hadn't said anything funny. The sentiments he had endeavored to express were not laughable. Groping about in his mind (which was beginning to yawn in a most alarming manner on a sea of champagne) for a key to the facetiousness displayed by Milburn and West, he came to the conclusion that Mireille was to blame. She was a detriment and a nuisance. Her presence alone was enough to make his new found friends believe that he was a frivolous trifler. Which was altogether wrong. He was desperately in earnest. Mireille, he concluded, must go.

"You joke," he said, "but that is because you do not comprehend what the Legion means to me. It has been a refuge. My name means nothing to you . . . but, perhaps, you have heard of Lictor?"

He paused, smiling faintly as he peered at them through the thick blue haze. Their faces were blank. His smile faded. The name meant nothing to them.

"I knew a guy called Victor in Fort Lauderdale," began West. "A barracuda bit a hunk out of his right leg. I guess you don't mean him. Let me tell you, that guy suffered . . ."

Toxandre swallowed hard. Their ignorance tied his stomach up in knots.

"I said Lictor," he repeated, "with an 'L' as for London."

"He speaks in parables," said Milburn, holding up a long forefinger. "Perpend! It may be important. Who knows? Perhaps he is a medium . . . That's it. He's in a trance. Be still, m'dear fellow, we are about to hear from another and a better world." Placing the tips of his fingers on the table he called out in a hollow voice, which startled Mireille out of a year's growth, "Ho, Lictor with an 'L,' we await thy message. Rap once if you are the spirit of Julius Cæsar's favorite police inspector, twice if . . ."

TOXANDRE put an end to this buffoonery.

"I am Lictor," he shouted. "Lictor of the *Gazette Impartiale.*"

Whereupon Milburn covered his face with his hands and started to pray for the souls of those who are about to lose their sanity, and West drank a toast to Lictor of the *Gazette.*

Only with the utmost perseverance was Toxandre able to say what he had to say.

Lictor, he explained, was his nom de plume . . . His writing name, he yelled at West when the latter tried

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to drink a toast to good old Charley Nom de Plume. Even if he did say so himself he had been one of the most influential political reporters in all Paris. In all France for that matter!

His articles had appeared daily on the front page of the *Gazette Impartiale,* where he had waged a brilliant campaign against the graft and corruption that were undermining the foundations of the Republic.

"Hot dawg!" cried West, but Toxandre overlooked this stupid interruption and addressed himself to Milburn, who was listening avidly.

He had been a crusader, he swore, fighting for truth and righteousness. The scandals he had unearthed had brought down upon him the wrath of those shadowy but enormously powerful forces which in all modern countries control the puppets who are supposed to govern. He knew too much. He was incorruptible. His destruction had become inevitable.

He had been about to run a series of sensational articles about the crooked deals of one Alexandre Sambard, an industrialist closely connected with the government. But the day before the first article was scheduled to appear the secret police, the notorious *Sûreté Générale,* had been given orders to silence him.

The owner of the Gazette, Monsieur Laverneur, had been run over by a taxi in the rue de Rivoli. An accident? Certainly not! A deliberately planned political murder. He, Toxandre, had escaped the same fate by the narrowest of margins. Forewarned by the managing editor, he had fled from Paris. He had been tracked and hounded from one end of France to the other, until at last, unable to bear the strain, he had joined the Legion.

He might have added, but he didn't, that the *Gazette Impartiale* had been a scandal-mongering, blackmailing sheet, and that its owner, Laverneur, whether or not the secret police had murdered him, richly deserved his fate.

Toxandre himself, notwithstanding the high moral principles he proclaimed, had been a gatherer of backstairs gossip, a snitcher of documents, whose methods had been as dubious and objectionable as those of the men on whom he vented his waspish spleen in the columns of the Gazette . . . unless they paid the price demanded by Laverneur for his silence.

Toxandre had had a narrow squeak. He had been abominably frightened not only because the *Sûreté Générale* has a way of its own of wiping out its enemies, but because his conscience was far from clear.

HE was up to his neck in the Sambard affair, a complicated one centering around a juicy contract for the building of five battle cruisers and the very odd manner in which it had been obtained. He had bribed night watchmen, purloined documents from confidential files, and delved enthusiastically into the private lives of a score of government officials, naval officers and engineers.

On another occasion he had made love very beautifully to a stenographer in Sambard's own office so that he might obtain possession of certain check stubs bearing the initials of some prominent politicians. That episode had been rather quaint. The little stenographer's idea of a good time had been to sit on a park bench and hold hands, and chatter about the furnishings of the apartment they were going to rent at Asnieres when they were married.

Married indeed! *Quelle blague!* He

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had dropped her as tactfully as possible as soon as the check stubs were stowed away in Laverneur's safe. But the simpleton, instead of looking upon the incident as a pleasant interlude in an otherwise drab existence, had made a great fuss.

Not long afterward the crew of a coal barge had fished her body out of the Seine. How she got there nobody knew, and Laverneur, who took a delight in such incidents, had given her half a stick of type at the bottom of column eight on page four. The paragraph had been captioned *"Chagrin d'Amour."*

But those days were gone forever. Toxandre had known no peace until the gates of the Sidi-bel-Abbes had closed behind him.

He had been so overjoyed to have escaped the knives, bullets and taxicabs of the *Sûreté Générale* that he had sworn never again to have anything to do either with journalism or politics. Which was perhaps just as well, for there was not a paper in all Paris that would have trusted him in its editorial room.

His whole scale of values had changed, and he had discovered that one thing he really wanted to do was to carve out a career for himself in the army. He was French, he was well educated. By contrast with most Legionnaires he was brilliantly endowed. Given time and a little luck nothing could keep him from climbing to the top of the tree.

The sound of Toxandre's own voice proclaiming his own virtues in that squalid gin-mill filled him with emotion. A weaker man might have tried to strike a bargain with the *Sûreté Générale*. He might have become one of its most valued informants. But that was not his way. Deliberately he had dedicated himself to a life of hardship and self-abnegation and discipline.

"I served my country with my pen," he declared. "But that is finished. Today I serve it with my sword . . ."

And at that moment Mireille threw one arm around his neck and cried: "Be not so excited, my cabbage. You overheat yourself. What is it you are recounting that is so droll? Pay a little attention to me now and then. I too would like to laugh as your friends are laughing."

Had he not been a gentleman of culture and refinement he would have killed her.

He could not shake her off. She clung to him like a vine.

"Love is wonderful," Milburn was saying to West.

"Love is tripe," West retorted. "Gimme champagne. In the long run it's cheaper. How about a wee Dock and Doris, Herr Poker-Face?"

"Hear, hear!" approved Milburn. "We'll drink to the man with the sword."

"It is my turn," cried Toxandre, doing his best to free himself from Mireille's embrace without having to resort to open violence. "This time I buy the champagne."

HE had no money but, *sapristi!* he had brains. He'd get rid of this female leech who refused to understand that she was no longer wanted! She was not going to make him ridiculous . . .

Disengaging one arm he snapped his fingers at Señor Lugnatti, who was standing a few paces away, scratching the mosquito bites on the back of his neck.

"Champagne!" ordered Toxandre. "A magnum of your best, my good fellow!"

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Lugnatti's feet had wings. In a minute he was back with a bottle wrapped in a clean napkin. But he had had too much to do with Legionnaires to run any needless risks. They were all tarred with the same brush whether they had a thousand francs or two sous to throw away. They were crapulous scoundrels, never to be trusted under any circumstances.

"Here she is!" he announced heartily. "Straight off the ice. The best. Dry Monopole 1915." He held out one hand, palm upward. "That will be fifty-five francs, if you please."

Toxandre's hand went to his left hand breast pocket. The pocket was empty.

"That is strange," he exclaimed. "I always keep my wallet in the same place."

His hands flew with increasing rapidity from pocket to pocket. No wallet. He smacked himself all over. Still no wallet.

"You have lost something?" inquired Mireille, putting two and two together.

He went off like a firecracker.

"Have I lost something! My pocketbook—gone! My money—gone! I had it here . . . a moment ago . . . *I have been robbed.*" His voice filled the room. "My pocket has been picked."

"Gently, gently," cautioned Lugnatti, thrusting out his heavy jaw. "None of that, soldier. Mind what you say . . ."

He was very sensitive about such matters. At eleven o'clock at night, when his customers were nicely befuddled, it was dangerous to have such words as "robbery" and "theft" bandied about so loosely.

Toxandre kicked back his chair and stood up. Once more he explored all his pockets, frantically.

"I tell you it's gone, my wallet," he clamored. "It contained two hundred and fifty francs. It's been taken. I have been robbed!"

All conversation had stopped. The couples on the dance floor stood still.

"Shut up and sit down—or get out," ordered Lugnatti. "You're drunk. You won't get another drink in here."

"Better sit down," urged Milburn. "I'll pay for the champagne, old top." He turned to West when Toxandre ignored his suggestion. "I rather think we are headed straight for trouble," he observed placidly. "Bit of a nuisance, what?"

West grinned from ear to ear.

"Looks bad," he admitted. "There's some fast stuff being pulled off, but I'll be doggoned if I can dope it out."

Toxandre was shouting: "You have no right to say I am drunk. You can't frighten me!"

Something on the floor, beneath Mireille's chair, caught his eye. He stooped and snatched up his wallet. He shook it, smelled it, turned it inside out. It contained not a single penny.

"You did this," he cried fiercely. "While your arm was around my neck. I might have known!"

"Raoul," she wailed. "It is not so, my little one. I would not do such a thing."

BUT there was no stopping him. He denounced Mireille and Lugnatti and Madame Lugnatti, calling upon his comrades of the Legion to witness the dishonesty of these odious creatures.

"That's right," agreed a maudlin voice from the back of the room. "They're robbers — hic — all of them . . ."

"It ought to be called the Thieves'

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Rendez-Vous," another man sang out.

"I demand my money, my two hundred and fifty francs, or I shall have you arrested!" brayed Toxandre.

Mireille sprang to her feet. Her job, her liberty, her reputation, such as it was, hung by the slenderest of threads. She saw clearly that Toxandre, for reasons best known to himself, was trying to double-cross her.

In one second all the affection she had had for him turned to violent hatred. And did she give him a piece of her mind? She did. She flayed him alive and wound up her performance by smacking his face with so much force that the sound of the blow rang like a pistol shot.

Then she burst into tears and fled into the protecting arms of Madame Lugnatti.

"I demand justice," yelled Toxandre, a thread of blood running out of his nostrils into his mustache. "Call the police! Legionnaires, are you going to allow these bandits to bleed you white? I have been robbed of two hundred and fifty francs!"

"That's a lot of money," jeered a Legionnaire. "Where did you steal it, my old one?"

A gust of laughter swept the room, and Lugnatti, realizing that the crowd was still neutral, decided that the time had come to put an end to Toxandre's outburst which was interfering with the customers' consumption of wine. He didn't give a curse whether or not Toxandre had been robbed. The important thing to do was to get him off the premises without delay.

"Outside!" he ordered, including West and Milburn in a sweeping gesture. "Come on now, no argument. You've had enough. This is a respectable establishment. We obey the law. Yes, we do! We don't serve drinks to men who can't hold their liquor. *Allez, oust!* On your way, all of you."

"Scoundrel," shouted Toxandre, who was really beginning to believe he had been robbed. "You ought to be put in prison for allowing that woman . . . Don't touch me!" he cried as Lugnatti laid hands on him. "I'll report you!"

Lugnatti's right hand closed on the front of Toxandre's tunic just under the collar. Lugnatti's left closed on his belt. Toxandre felt himself being lifted off the ground and rushed backward toward the door. Two waiters held the door open, and he sailed through the air like a leaf in the breeze. Unlike a leaf, however, he landed in the roadway with a jolt.

## CHAPTER IV.

### TOWN PATROL.

LOUD applause greeted Lugnatti as he retraced his steps. But he wasn't through yet. He jerked back the table and barked at West and Milburn: "Didn't I tell you to get out? Hustle, or I'll knock your heads off."

He was in too great a hurry to wait for an answer. Reaching over, he hooked his fingers in the front of West's tunic, and the next thing he knew something very hard, traveling very fast, landed on his right eye. He tottered backward, tripped against the chair vacated by Mireille and went sprawling.

Another round of applause, much more sustained than the first, greeted his downfall. Toxandre had disappointed them. He was not representative of the Legion at its best. West and Milburn seemed much more likely to uphold the regiment's good name.

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"*Rentre dedans!*" shouted a gray bearded veteran, pounding the table with his fist. "Beat him up! His wine is not fit to drink and I know what I'm talking about! Kill him!"

Lugnatti, with his one sound eye, saw the danger signs. Unless he regained the esteem of his clients they were quite capable of tearing the whole place apart. It had happened before.

"Get them!" he bellowed at his staff. "Heave them out!"

Snatching up a water jug, he dashed into the fray, and promptly dashed out again, one hand clasped over his bleeding mouth.

After that a great deal happened in a very short space of time. Spurred on by Madame Lugnatti's magnificent screams, a dozen waiters armed with chairs, syphons and bottles closed in with a rush. A chair leg cracked Milburn over one ear, a fist bounced off the other. Blood streamed down West's face from a gash over his right eye.

But they more than held their own, for the other Legionnaires were hampering Lugnatti and his waiters in a thousand ways—sticking big feet out into the aisles to trip them, overturning chairs in their path, tossing mugs and saucers about with carefree abandon.

A green satin slipper skimmed Madame Lugnatti's coiffure and swept a row of ornamental ruby-colored glasses off the shelf at her back. She made unladylike remarks in a tone of voice that must have carried all the way to the central police station. An acetylene lamp, struck by a beer bottle, crashed to the floor.

The fighting spread. Five hilarious Legionnaires rushed the bar, hoisted the barman across the counter, and helped themselves to Lugnatti's stock of vermouths, anis, and cordials.

Another wrecking crew, in search of hidden treasure, attacked the piano and kicked it to pieces. A third party, seizing time and a couple of waiters by the forelock, made a dash for the wine cellar only to be stopped by Señora Lugnatti who, armed with an ice pick, threatened in no uncertain terms to disembowel the first man who came within range.

The Legionnaires carried sidearms. They could have made a monstrous pin cushion of the *señora,* but they did nothing of the sort, for they meant no harm. Hiccupping with laughter they turned away and joined in the mad scramble for the twenty-five centime pieces pouring out of the devastated piano.

In the middle of the room, reclining against an overturned table, a Russian with a magnificent spade beard was singing "Farewell, my son, I am dying!" in a basso-profundo voice as deep and grave as the tolling of some great bronze bell. Tears streamed down his cheeks as he sang. He was beating time with a long wooden slat with a hinge flapping loose on one end.

At the heart of the turmoil West, Milburn, Lugnatti and at least four waiters rolled about on the floor in a confused mass that moved in a series of violent jerks in the general direction of the front door.

THEY were about six feet from the exit when Milburn suddenly found himself kneeling on Lugnatti's chest. He hadn't the slightest idea how he came to be there. A second earlier he had been smothering to death, beneath Lugnatti's large and billowing belly. Never before had he taken part in such a roughhouse.

He had not struck a blow in anger since the age of six when a determined

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governess had taught him the rudiments of self-control. His own brutality astounded him, and yet in that split second when he hauled off and prepared to sock Lugnatti's jaw, he realized that he would not have changed places just then with any one. The blow landed. Lugnatti's head bounced like a football and rolled sideways, turning a hairy ear pitted with blackheads toward Milburn.

He was still studying that unwholesome ear when West and two waiters fell over him and as he went down he heard West yell, "Scram . . ."

Somebody blew a shrill blast on a whistle. The bedlam subsided and a voice shouted in the ensuing silence:

"Every man present is under arrest. Fall in outside, *et pas de rouspetance!* And no argument or else . . ."

The waiters scrambled off West's chest; West slid off Milburn's back. They were too dazed to stand up. In the doorway stood an adjutant of the Legion, a strapping fellow, with huge mustachios growing out halfway across his cheeks. Behind him gleamed the bayonets of the town patrol.

The party was over.

"Get up!" ordered the adjutant, and his voice was the voice of Authority.

West and Milburn tottered to their feet. They even made a vague pretense of standing at attention.

"*Very* pretty," commented the adjutant, slightly mollified by their good intentions. "Perfect discipline. Get outside, you hyenas. Fall in!"

Brushing the crowd aside Madame Lugnatti sank to her knees and clasped her husband's head in her arms. It was not an attractive head, far from it, but she must have admired it, for she wailed:

"Emilio! My Emilio! Answer me, my beloved! He does not answer!" she screamed. "They have murdered my Emilio. He is dead!"

He was not dead. Her strident cries speeded his recovery. He opened one eye.

"Assassins," he muttered. "Brigands . . ."

But the adjutant had not spent some twelve years in the Legion without learning a great deal about the Lugnattis of this earth who grow rich selling bad wine to thirsty troopers.

"Have it your own way," he said sharply. "Assassins and brigands, are they? Have you any specific complaints to make against any of these men or is that a mere figure of speech? Come on now! Wake up! I can't hang around here all night."

Leaning heavily upon his wife, Lugnatti stood up. His temper was cooling off fast. He knew that if he lodged a complaint against the Legionnaires they would put him out of business in a month. He could not afford to be too indignant and vindictive. His café was wrecked, but the tables and chairs and piano were the cheapest money could buy and he had lost at a rough estimate five hundred francs of stock. Such losses were trifling compared to the profits he could make if he could retain the good will of the Legionnaires.

"No complaints," he grumbled. "I'd be the last one to make trouble for these boys . . . and anyway the fellow who started it isn't here now. I threw that one out on his ear."

"Got his name?"

Lugnatti shook his head.

FROM the rear end of the room came Mireille's shrill voice:

"Toxandre, that's his name. The dirty beast. He called me a thief. I'll fix him one of these days . . ."

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"Never saw him before," repeated Lugnatti. "Don't know the first thing about him."

"I'll take your word for it," agreed the adjutant, giving his mustache a twirl as he gazed appraisingly at Mireille. "I'll book the gang on a drunk and disorderly charge. That suit you?"

It suited Lugnatti down to the ground. The Legionnaires filed out, formed up on two ranks and marched back to barracks hedged in by the bayonets of the town patrol.

The orderly sergeant counted the prisoners into the guard-room which was already full to overflowing, and stank right prettily of feet and vomit. There was no room on the sleeping platform. West and Milburn stretched out on the floor.

"What do you think of the Legion now, Poker-Face?" inquired West, folding his tunic into a tight wad to use as a pillow.

Milburn's lower lip was so swollen that he spoke with considerable difficulty.

"My own depravity amazes me," he confessed. "I am inexpressibly shocked, and all that sort of thing, but I am compelled to admit that I have had a most enjoyable evening."

"Same here," chuckled West. "I wonder what became of that bird Toxandre. I'm sort of leary of that bozo."

"Quaint little bounder, isn't he? He's tucked away in bed, probably, dreaming of honor and glory and flags. Don't be too hard on him. He livened up the party."

"You're damn well tooting he did! But I've got a hunch he's not on the level. I'd bet even money that jane didn't frisk him. She was . . ."

He did not bother to complete the sentence, for Milburn was no longer listening. A gargling sound bubbled up in his throat. He began to snore with slow deliberation.

"The lucky stiff," grumbled West, squirming over onto his back. "A swell chance I have of getting to sleep. Got to lie here all night long and think . . ."

He was sound asleep in ten seconds.

## CHAPTER V.

### THREE DAYS IN SOLITARY.

TOXANDRE lurched and nearly fell to his knees. He spoke in a choking whisper scarcely audible above the steady grind of a thousand pairs of hobnailed boots on the hard road surface.

"*Je suis à bout!* I am finished. I cannot go on!"

Milburn, who had once been noted for his distinction and restraint, spat out a mouthful of dust.

"Don't be an ass, m'dear chap. We're there. I can see the first houses."

"My feet," moaned Toxandre. "My poor feet . . ."

"And so what?" croaked West, hobbling along beside him. "Your feet, Milburn's feet, my feet . . . All God's soldiers got blisters on their feet. Quit crabbing for a while, will you? You're worse than the seven days' itch."

Since break of day the depot battalion had covered forty kilometers and had carried out extensive field maneuvers on a sun-drenched, shadowless plain under the expert guidance of Colonel Ballande and his staff.

The colonel, in a brief address to the troops, had praised their martial ardor and had informed them that they were in perfect physical condition—in other words, ready for active service. That day they had proved themselves to be full fledged Legionnaires, a

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credit, so he said, to the skill and devotion of their instructors. He was certain that they would live up to the high standards and the exalted traditions of their beloved regiment.

Then, in a flurry of salutes, he had climbed into his high-powered staff car and had driven back to Sidi-bel-Abbes, while the depot battalion had followed in his wake, pounding out the miles on blistered, bleeding feet.

They didn't feel like full-fledged Legionnaires as they neared the outskirts of Sidi-bel-Abbes. They felt like nothing on earth. For most of them the march was their first endurance test under campaign conditions, in full marching order which included such trifles as a topheavy knapsack, a rifle, an entrenching tool, a haversack, a bayonet, cartridge pouches, cooking pots, tents and tent pegs and "such personal possessions as they chose to carry without prejudicing their efficiency."

Many, unable to move another inch, had dropped into the dusty grass by the roadside. The others hobbled along with the stiff, unnatural gait of sleep walkers. They were stupid with exhaustion, but of them all, Toxandre was the most pathetic figure.

HE had started out blithely enough: he had been the inspiration of the section. He knew all the smuttiest marching songs and he had shouted them at the top of his lungs as the battalion swung at sunrise through the village.

The company commander had commented favorably on his fine spirit. But as the heat became oppressive and the dust swirled up in choking clouds Toxandre had begun to fade out. He had faded out, however, with a great display of fortitude.

The most casual observer would have noted that he was suffering agonies, nevertheless his morale was admirable. His neighbors grumbled and cursed and lapsed into sour silence as they drew upon their ultimate ounce of energy to cover the last few miles. Toxandre groaned and grunted too, but unlike his neighbors whenever an officer rode down the line, he never failed to raise his head and to smile a smile which seemed to say:

"Observe *me!* I am unutterably weary, but my spirit is unconquerable. I shall not fail you!"

The home stretch, however, had been too much for him. It was only by leaning heavily on Milburn and West that he had managed to crawl along. Not only did he lean upon them, but he was so damnably woebegone that, without quite knowing how it happened, they had found themselves toting his knapsack or his rifle, if not his knapsack and his rifle. And yet, even while they held him up and carried most of his kit, he contrived to create the illusion that they were being uplifted and guided by him.

Not since that first night at the Rendez-Vous had they been able to shake him off. He had forced them to accept his friendship, his comradeship, his high-minded principles. He was a pest, but he meant so well that they did not have the heart to hurt his feelings. And he was full of feelings, all of them tender and easily bruised.

"You despise me," he said to West who was bowed down beneath the weight of two knapsacks. "Perhaps you are right. Let me go! Let me drop. It is nothing. I have done my best."

He sagged down and they almost collapsed as they strained against his dead weight.

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"Don't you think you could contrive to keep your confounded feet on the ground?" panted Milburn. "That isn't asking too much, is it? Or would you like me to carry you in my arms?"

"What he needs," West chimed in, "is one of those rolling chairs like they have on the boardwalk at Atlantic City. He'd be easier to push than to carry . . ."

"My friends," groaned Toxandre, "you have been kind . . ."

A bugle call rang out up ahead. The column lurched to a standstill. It had reached the outskirts of the city. Shacks and laborers' cottages lined both sides of the street. Small, half naked Arab children stood about on the sidewalk staring round-eyed at the troopers. The dust began to settle. An order, shouted from section to section, came down the line:

"Tunic b u t t o n e d. Caps on straight . . ."

"Sorry, Toxandre," said West, "but I guess you'll have to carry your own pack. Can't disobey orders . . ."

"And your rifle," added Milburn. "This hurts me more than its does you . . ."

Toxandre struggled into his harness. He straightened his back.

"I am ready," he announced. "I will not disappoint you."

Another bugle call rang out, followed by rolling thunder of drums. And all at once the regimental band, which had marched out to meet the battalion, blared the opening bars of "Sambre et Meuse." The column went ahead again in quick time.

"In step!" barked the non-coms. "Pick it up! Left . . . left . . . left, right, left . . . Step out . . ."

The lilting tune, the beat of the drums, the sight of people on the sidewalks, put fresh life into the troopers, spurred them on. Veterans could have done no better. By the time the Second Company tramped into the town Toxandre had forgotten the blisters on his heels. He pranced along like a two-year-old, head up, chest out, his little beard pointing skyward. Beside him West and Milburn looked dull and uninspired.

The head of the column was wheeling through the barrack gateway onto the parade ground when he exclaimed:

"*Mazette!* There's a new one. Look quickly—look! There is the prettiest girl I have seen since I have been in Africa. And so chic! She is lovely. Some officer's wife I suppose . . ."

Milburn caught a glimpse of a slim white figure standing by the curb in the shadow of the plantain trees.

"Don't you ever think of anything else?" he began. "Your mind . . ."

West suddenly let out a yell:

"Connie! For crying out loud!"

THERE was a startled ring to his voice. He checked his pace and was nearly knocked down as his rear rank man blundered into him.

For a second or so, under the eyes of the colonel and the colonel's staff, the whole platoon lost its fine cohesion, the ranks straggled all over the place while the troopers gaped and grinned at the girl in white.

So far as the sergeant and the section commander were concerned the incident was nothing less than catastrophic. The sergeant, Brankovich, swung into action first, braying:

"Silence, band of cows that you are! Look to your front, West, you cretin, you imbecile, you pig! You'll do two days' ordinary arrest to teach you to keep your mouth shut when you're marching at attention!"

"But damn it!" protested West, for-

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getting all he had learned about discipline and deportment and obedience. "Don't you understand? That's my wife . . ."

Then the section commander, Second Lieutenant Etameur, hove in sight, and he was sweating at every pore.

"Forward!" he ordered. "Left, right, left! This is a disgrace! Left, right, left! I am amazed, Sergeant! Amazed! Have you no control over your men? This Legionnaire created a disturbance? Place him under arrest! He is under arrest? Make it three days in solitary confinement! Left, right, left!"

West waved to the girl on the sidewalk.

"Okay, kid," he sang out. "Hold everything . . . I'll be seeing you!"

Lieutenant Etameur peered uneasily out of the tail end of his eye at the trouble maker, half expecting him to go mad and start bayonetting his neighbors. He knew little or nothing about the recruits he had led that day, for there is practically no contact between officers and men at the depot, where the training is entrusted to non-commissioned drill instructors who can be depended upon to instil far more respect for authority into their very hard-boiled pupils than any second lieutenant could possibly hope to do.

"Who is that man?" breathed Etameur as the section at long last reached the parade ground.

"Name of West," stated Brankovich. "An American," he added significantly.

"An American," repeated Etameur, raising both eyebrows so high that they touched the sweat band of his cap. *"Ah, là là là!"*

That one exclamation expressed his meaning more clearly than if he had talked for an hour. Obviously, he did not have a very good opinion of Americans as Legionnaires.

"And," Brankovich went on after a brief pause, "they wished an Englishman on me, too. They're all crazy, those people. You think everything is going along smoothly and first thing you know . . ."

Etameur, feeling the conversation was growing too personal, cut him short.

"We must make no distinctions," he said curtly. "To do so is a great mistake. A man's nationality does not concern us. Bear that in mind always, please!"

Brankovich had served more years than Etameur had served months, but he knew what was expected of him.

"Yes, *mon lieutenant,*" he promised. "You are quite right, *mon lieutenant!*"

## CHAPTER VI.

### A. W. O. L.

CHEERS, catcalls, a volley of sarcastic comments greeted West when, at dusk, he burst into the barrackroom with his shirt and his tunic dangling over one arm.

He grinned good-naturedly, but did not stop to answer any of the questions the Legionnaires shouted at him. Hurrying down the aisle he flung his clothes onto his cot and turned to Milburn, who was rubbing tallow into the inner lining of a large, black boot.

"Did you see her?" asked West.

Milburn held up the boot and examined it critically.

"I did. Nice girl. Sensible. Grasped the situation at once."

West stepped out of his filthy canvas trousers.

"That's swell! Say, Bob, I'm buggy. That damn cell . . . I was eaten alive

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. . . I'm crawling. Got to go to the showers—quick. Where's she staying?"

"At the Continental. She's expecting you. Room 12. I'll take care of your duds if you're in a hurry . . ."

WEST laughed harshly. In a hurry? He had spent not three days, but a week in a black and filthy cell, for the company commander, according to time-hallowed custom, had doubled the sentence imposed by the second lieutenant.

By day West had done hours of pack drill, by night hordes of vermin had kept him awake. He had had too much time to think, to wonder why Connie had come to Sidi-bel-Abbes instead of going home, to question the validity of the motives that had driven him into the Legion.

He had been satisfied with his lot, content to live from day to day without cares or responsibility . . . and then, because he had seen Connie for the space of perhaps ten seconds, he had gone haywire. He didn't know whether he was coming or going, whether he liked or hated the Legion.

Milburn put a towel and a cake of yellow soap in his hand.

"Showers, m'dear fellow," he drawled. "And if I were you . . . I mean to say, I'm not urging it upon you, but I think I'd shave . . ."

He was picking West's clothes off the floor when Toxandre, who had been talking earnestly to the corporal at the far end of the room, bustled up.

"One is worried about West," he declared. "It is unfortunate he informed that woman of his address. She has the bad influence upon him, that is evident."

Milburn tied the dirty clothes in a bundle and helped himself to a cigarette.

"There are times," he said placidly, "when it is more than a little wise, esteemed Monsieur Toxandre, to mind one's own business, what? May I suggest that this has nothing to do with either of us?"

"I am afraid of that woman," Toxandre went on, folding his arms across his chest and scowling at the floor. "You see . . . I like our good friend West. He has become more than a comrade to me. He is a brother."

"That's very jolly and all that sort of thing . . . but I wonder whether you have ever heard that age-old truism about relatives being an act of God whereas our friends . . ."

"I admire him," said Toxandre. "He is always so gay, so carefree, so *vivant*, is it not? What you call so alive! He has personality. He will make a superb soldier some day."

"You take a great load off my mind."

"It is the truth!" retorted Toxandre, irritated by Milburn's unemotional attitude. "But this woman . . . this Cornelia, she will spoil everything. Already, because of her, he has spent seven days in prison. That will look bad on his record. I do not want him to spoil his chances of promotion. What does she want? She must go away and leave him alone. There is no other solution. For the next five years he is a Legionnaire. He cannot get out. He cannot go back to her. Before long he will be on active service."

"He will," agreed Milburn, "but in the meantime, old top, don't you think it would be simply ripping, as it were, if we allowed them to work out their own salvation? They . . ."

West was back again, panting, sputtering, scattering water in all directions.

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"Hello there, Whiskerino, old boy! Ease over while I get dressed. Never let 'em put you in prison or you'll have to shave off all that shrubbery of yours. You'd catch cold and . . ."

"West," began Toxandre, looking grave, "I have something to say to you."

"Leave the man alone," Milburn broke in. "Can't you see he's in a hurry?"

But Toxandre could not keep still. After a period of painful silence that lasted at least five seconds, he inquired: "You are not intending to go to town, I trust?"

"Trust me! I'll say I am!"

Toxandre sighed, "I am very sorry. You cannot leave barracks tonight."

"What the blue, flaming Hades are you talking about?" demanded West.

TOXANDRE backed away. The look on West's face was far from reassuring.

"It is against regulations. No soldier is allowed out of barracks the day he leaves prison. You will have to wait until tomorrow night. I asked the room corporal . . . Corporal Van Zanten . . ."

"You did what?" exclaimed West, speaking through clenched teeth.

Toxandre backed a little farther away.

"Do not be impatient," he begged. "I desired to help you, to avoid trouble for you. The corporal said . . ."

West's voice was flat and hard:

"Do you mean to tell me *you* asked the corporal if *I* could go out?"

"For your own good. It is so hard to memorize all the rules . . ."

"It hurts him more than it hurts you," Milburn said acidly. "You want to see your wife, don't you? All right. As soon as you are dressed we'll walk over to the canteen and look at the stars. There are many beautiful constellations to be seen at this hour of the evening."

"But . . ." hazarded Toxandre, fearing the very worst.

Milburn with unexpected agility hopped across the bed and grasped Toxandre by the arm.

"Just so," he said affably. "Toxandre, my very good chap, I have the greatest affection for you, and so has West. We appreciate your helpfulness, your eagerness to be of service. Therefore," he tightened his grip on Toxandre's arm and favored him with a most unpleasant smile, "therefore, would you mind doing me a personal favor? Run over to the canteen and reserve a table for us, will you? It's going to be crowded in a very few minutes . . ."

"You want me to go away!" protested Toxandre. "You . . ."

"How did you guess!" laughed Milburn. "Isn't that remarkable?"

Toxandre wrenched his arm loose, turned on his heel and walked away. When he reached the doorway, however, he called out, "Good luck!"

"The son of a gun!" rasped West. "What's it to him what I do?"

"He means well," shrugged Milburn. "Don't bother about him. He's like an affectionate puppy. Always underfoot and jealous . . ."

"Says you. I can't dope him out. He talks too much about duty and discipline and honor to suit me, but that may be the French in him. They seem to love that sort of hooey." He fastened his leather belt over his cummerbund as he spoke and picked up his cap. "All set, Bob? Let's get going."

Corporal Van Zanten hailed them as they passed his bed.

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"*Dis donc,* West, where is it you are going?"

"Canteen. Any objections?"

The corporal's face was a blank, but his right eyelid seemed to flutter. He got up and slouched after them into the corridor.

"So far as I'm concerned," he observed lowering his voice, "you can go to the canteen . . . or anywhere else you like . . . but I wouldn't go out the front gate if I were you. Sergeant Brankovich is on duty. He'd spot you a mile away.

"Do you want to hear something funny?" he went on, rubbing the back of his hand across his mouth. "Before I was promoted I was a bad egg. It's a fact. Lots of times when I couldn't get a pass I used to sneak over the wall. I don't know whether the boys still go out that way, but just behind the repair shop there's a spot where the bricks are worn away.

"You can sail over like a breeze. Nothing easier. Funny they don't mend those holes, isn't it? Well, if you're going to the canteen I won't hold you back. By the way, you don't happen to have the price of a bottle of wine do you? Till pay day."

A five franc note changed hands.

"Some outfit!" muttered West clattering down the long flight of stone steps. "Look at that bird: ten years' service, a flock of medals . . . holding me up for the price of a bottle of red ink. Boy, I've changed my mind about a lot of things lately!"

"He told you how to get out, didn't he?" retorted Milburn. "He knows exactly what you're going to do and he's helping you to do it. That ought to be worth five francs."

"Guess you're right," admitted West. "I've got the jitters, that's what it amounts to."

"Have you any plans? I mean to say, any idea what you're going to do?"

"Not the foggiest. A week ago everything was fine and dandy. I was all set for life. Today I'm right up in the air. Maybe after I've had a talk with Connie I'll know where I stand."

"You have my deepest sympathy. I wouldn't be in your boots for a thousand pounds. The Legion must have been created specially to harbor the likes of me. Nothing could induce me to go back to the old life, but," he confessed, "I don't happen to be married to a very charming girl . . ."

Skirting the repair shop they came to the outer wall. There was no one in sight. Night had closed in, hot and dark. The wall was easy to scale.

"WATCH out for military policemen," urged Milburn as West sat astride the crest.

"I'm watching," said West. "If anybody tries to stop me now, boy, I'll brain 'em!"

Milburn sauntered away with his nose in the air and his hands in his pockets. As he reached the alleyway between the repair shop and the stables a voice whispered close to his ear:

"I saw him go. It is dangerous what he is doing. Women—always women! What a tragedy!"

"Well, well, well!" exclaimed Milburn. "Here we are again. Old Sober-Sides in the flesh, by Jove! You shouldn't snoop, my dear fellow. It's not done. Not by the best people."

"I am not snooping," Toxandre said indignantly. "I desire only to make myself useful to my friends. I have been mounting guard here to make sure that no one sees him jump the wall."

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"Against your better judgment, of course?"

Toxandre nodded emphatically.

"That is true. Against my better judgment. But what else could I do? I endeavored to stop him. I failed. So then I place myself at his disposal to facilitate his escape."

"Stout fellah! Let's have a bottle of canteen wine and see if we can't lubricate that conscience of yours."

Toxandre lengthened his stride.

"I am not thirsty," he asserted, "but I will be glad to keep you company."

He was not thirsty but he contrived to drink four liters of wine before wandering off to bed.

## CHAPTER VII.

### CONNIE WEST.

THE Hotel Continental is very select. It does not cater to the rank and file of the Legion. It is patronized by officers' wives, commercial travelers, members of the bar, and the *percepteur* of indirect taxes. In other words, the élite, the cream of the trade.

Its rooms, cluttered with nondescript furniture, are drab and dusty. Weak electric bulbs hang, shadeless, by a wire from the ceiling. The smell of cockroach powder lingers in bureau drawers. The mosquito netting over the beds has been darned and mended and patched so often that it resembles a quilt, which keeps out the air but lets in the insects.

The windows, however, overlook the grounds of the *Cercle Militaire,* than which there is nothing finer in town, and the sheets are changed once a week, regularly.

The instant West entered the lobby the temperature became arctic. Before he reached the desk he saluted nine officers, was glared at by at least twenty haughty ladies and yapped at by a spindle-legged, black-and-tan mutt which took a violent dislike to the squeaking sound made by his hobnailed boots on the tiled floor.

Behind the desk stood a clerk, a superior youth with a thick mop of greasy hair parted in the middle and a liberal sprinkling of pimples on his chin.

He gave West a look charged with loathing.

"Orderlies and messengers," he announced, pursing his lips as he spoke, "must use the service entrance."

West swallowed hard. He was tempted to reach across the counter and murder that clerk. Instead, he said:

"I have an appointment with Madame West. She is expecting my visit."

"Service entrance, if you please," repeated the young man.

West stood his ground. Perspiration broke out in beads on his forehead and his mouth went dry. He said slowly, enunciating each word with great care:

"Will you please inform her that her husband is here? *I* am Madame West's husband."

The expression on the clerk's pimply countenance expressed derision, contempt, surprise, and that love of dirt for dirt's sake which among the French is referred to as Gallic wit. His Gallic wit was working overtime.

For a week he had been heels over head in love with the so beautiful, the exquisite Madame West. She made all the other women look heat-withered and sallow. She was perfection. Whenever she came near him his hands grew clammy. According to hotel

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gossip she was one of those fabulously wealthy American tourists, too rich to be affected by any depression. She was said to have stopped off at Sidi-bel-Abbes to organize a motor trip to the oases of the far South. The little clerk had been overawed by her rumored wealth, by her clothes, the color of her eyes and the smooth line of her hips. He had worshiped her.

In her presence he had been tongue-tied and obsequious . . . only to learn that she was the wife of this hard-faced, uncouth Legionnaire with broken, dirty finger nails, who wasn't even allowed inside the hotel!

HIS fawning respect for Madame West vanished instantly. Socially she became dirt beneath his feet.

"Your wife, eh?" he observed ironically. "How very bizarre! You have some proof perhaps of this state of affairs?"

West had been in the Legion long enough to learn that there is no love lost between the good citizens of Sidi-bel-Abbes and the rank and file of the regiment. He was well aware of the fact that this small town upstart, strangling inside a high celluloid collar, not only despised but feared him as a dangerous scoundrel capable of the foulest crimes.

Leaning across the counter he said out of the corner of his mouth:

"If you don't hurry up, I'll be waiting for you some night soon, and I'll give you all the proof you want." His left hand brushed the hilt of his bayonet. "With this, *monsieur*. Do you comprehend? And now will you or will you not deliver my message?"

It worked like a charm. The clerk comprehended everything. He said hastily:

"I will have your message delivered, but you will have to go around to the service entrance and wait there for your answer. I repeat: you are not allowed in here. Do not compel me to warn you again!"

Victory was his. West swung on his heel and marched across the lobby. He was so exasperated that he omitted to salute a stout commissariat department officer, who rebuked him in no uncertain terms much to the heartfelt delight of every lady within earshot.

By a superhuman effort West managed to control his temper. He apologized, he smacked his heels together (which made the black-and-tan mutt yap madly), he saluted and was dismissed with such crushing condescension that he almost blew up.

Somehow, he stumbled out of the hotel, but he was still shaking with fury when he reached the service entrance, where the smell of rotting cabbage and spoiled meat was thick enough to cut with a knife.

He waited . . . one minute . . . two . . . ten minutes, and while he stood there, listening to the shoutings and bangings that came from the kitchen his resentment grew and grew, not only against the clerk who had treated him like a pariah, but against the Legion which relied upon despairing, broken men to do its work, and against himself because he had been fool enough to become enmeshed in such an outfit, and against Cornelia who seemed determined, no matter where he went, to upset his plans.

Had it not been for her evil influence, at that very moment he might have been at the controls of one of the new trans-continental airships, roaring through the night, watching for the swift flash of the wireless whispering in his ear . . . passengers



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dozing off in the warm cabin behind him . . .

"Newark airport . . . Newark calling Number Twenty-two . . ."

A lump rose up in his throat. Cursing, he pitched away a half smoked cigarette and ground it under his heel.

Then the door opened, and Cornelia stood before him, and his heart stopped beating. Even in that dingy half light he saw that she was as slim and lovely and desirable as ever she had been. There was a queer expression in her eyes, and her lower lip was not quite steady as she said:

"I'm simply crazy about that uniform, Tommy."

"Glad you like it," he snapped. "I'll be wearing it for the next five years."

Neither of them moved.

"Why didn't you go home?" he demanded after a long, empty pause. "Go home and get a divorce. What's the idea of coming out here?"

It was as though he were shouting at her through a high, thick wall.

"It's a free country," she pointed out.

"So what?"

She began to laugh.

"Tommy," she gulped, "you'll never know how funny you look. You're a scream."

The next moment the wall crumbled. He was holding her in his arms, and she was crying on his shoulder, and laughing, and a Negro kitchen boy, standing in the doorway with an overflowing garbage pail in his hands, stared at them, his thick-lipped mouth hanging wide open. And a myriad bluebottles, moths and mosquitoes buzzed about their heads. And they did not care.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

## *The Feathered Lindbergh*

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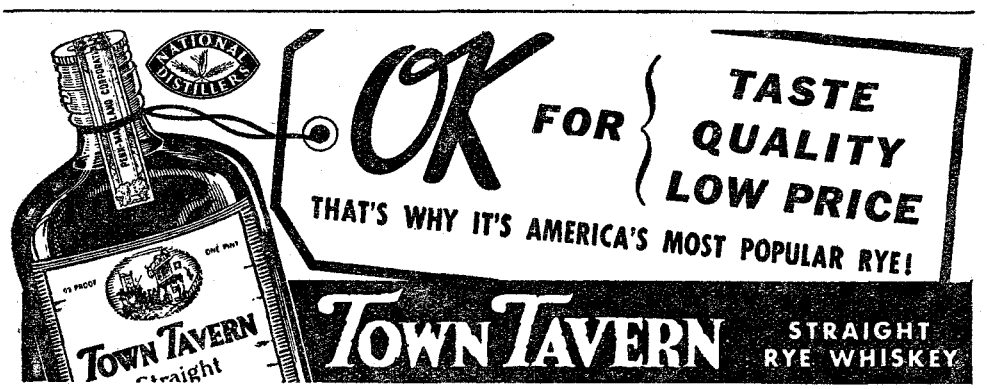
—*Joseph W. Skidmore.*

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*Five human skeletons stacked in a barricade on the bleak Mongolian plains led Farnsworth into one of the weirdest mysteries of the Orient*

# Tibetan Image

By HERB LEWIS

## CHAPTER I.

### OUT OF ITS MISERY.

WE were sitting after dinner in the archæologist's study, Farnsworth's old friend the fur trader, the Shanghai banker, and I, when suddenly I observed an uncanny seizure overcome our host. I saw Farnsworth suddenly shudder, grit his teeth in suppressed agony when from the blackness around us there came the piteous wail of a homeless Manchurian mongrel wandering to its death on the icy plains near by.

Outside the thick walls of Farnsworth's house, where we sat drinking our whisky-sodas, Changchun's inky blackness bucked the pitiless gales that swept in from the Mongolian plains.

Through the shivering bones of man and beast alike the winds shrieked on their remorseless journey to the dust-laden flatlands around the city. Only Manchuria could compound such a terrifying and soul chilling picture of wind, ice and sleet.



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The dog suddenly became ferocious

From directly beneath the window where Farnsworth stood a weird howl, plunging the depths of animal misery, broke from the throat of a shadow there. A long-drawn-out, heart-rending wail. Farnsworth's face, tanned from a vigorous outdoor life, grew deathly pale. Releasing his breath in a muttered oath, he rushed to the fireplace, grabbed a rifle from the rack and stalked silently out of the house.

I ran to the double window and strained hard to open it. The frigid air hit my face like a hammer's blow. And the mongrel's wailing came to my ear again, full of a dire, menacing sadness. Then a shot rang out in the darkness. A shadowy form leaped into the air and fell to the frozen ground with a last dying yelp. All was silent again. I closed the window. In another moment Farnsworth came back and hung the rifle in its rack above the mantelpiece.

"I knew you hated dogs," the banker said, puzzled. "Down in Shanghai we've heard stories of your strange



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fetish. But I didn't think you hated them as much as that—to kill them just because they howl."

"It all depends on *how* they howl," Farnsworth said. "Come here," he added abruptly. From his desk he took a powerful flashlight. We gathered around as Farnsworth opened the window.

His light played on the steaming dead animal in the road. It was the gauntest dog I had ever seen. Even in death with its eyes staring toward the black skies, and its fangs bared in a hideous grin, its lean shanks and taut belly gave an indelible impression of insatiable hunger.

Farnsworth swept the searchlight around the mongrel's lifeless body. Then he banged the window shut and sat down again, shaking his head as if amazed that we didn't understand.

"I shot it because it reminded me of something not very pleasant, and to get it out of its misery, for it was slowly starving to death. The Mongolians turn their dogs loose when food gets scarce, and they wander about like that until they are either killed or starve to death. To kill them is to put them out of a horrible misery." A fearful expression crept into his eyes. His voice took on a mocking tone. "Did any of you ever have the pleasant experience of building a little fortress out of the bones of five of your best friends?"

He didn't wait for an answer. "I saw a man who had that delightful experience," he went on. "The shock was too much for him. It nearly did me in, too. But it didn't worry this *taipan* in the least." His voice grew tragic. "All this happened out in the Mongolian plains. And it wouldn't have happened if human lust for money didn't exist."

There was an awed quality in his voice now.

"Cleanest skeletons I ever saw," Farnsworth continued. "It all ties up with the wrong kind of weather and the *way* that dog howled a while ago." Our host's eyes twinkled suddenly. "But look, maybe I'm boring you. Shall I go on? Or would you rather play bridge?"

Five human skeletons stacked in a barricade out in the plains! Not even the banker suggested bridge. Farnsworth relit his pipe. He stared out of the frosted window toward the northwest where the unexplored wastelands of Mongolia stretched for three thousand miles, and started.

## CHAPTER II.

### MISSING MEN.

YOU think this is cold (Farnsworth began). Well, this is a tropical paradise compared with the weather that winter. Forty-five below was the average.

That morning Burroughs barged in on my hectic life. I sat in my bed at noon, my head swathed in a cold towel, cursing *chemins de fer* and champagne, when Goon, my Chinese assistant, pattered into the room and announced a foreign gentleman.

Foreign strangers were rare that winter. I had the man ushered in. He was a bullishly built American, short and stocky, with an ugly face set off by a determined jaw. Fearlessness and unscrupulousness were written all over that face. You know the type as well as I. The kind of a man who usually obtained what he set out for. And a man who got right to the point.

He wasted no words on me. "I need your help," Burroughs said after in-

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troducing himself, "and I'm willing to pay for it."

I was in no condition to listen to such talk, and I told him so, but he brushed aside my protestations with a pudgy hand.

"Six men's lives depend on your help," he said.

"Why come to me?" I asked.

"Because, unfortunately, in all Manchuria right now you are the only foreigner who knows the languages of Mongolia and the caravan route to Urga."

And he told me an extraordinary tale, extraordinary because it pointed out some men's foolhardiness and willingness to take any risk for a pot of gold.

Six men were lost out on that impassable Mongolian plateau, lost because they had started on a mission that could lead only to disaster. As Burroughs told me of the quest through the smoke of a black cigar he puffed endlessly the short hairs of my neck bristled. I was so startled I lost my hangover.

Burroughs minced no words. He said:

"Would you like to share in a million dollars' worth of the most precious silver fox furs that ever were found in the Siberian mountains? Furs soft and silken as a king's coronation robe, strong as steel and lovely to look at as jade! They are out there under one roof somewhere in Urga, capital of Mongolia. And six men who went out at my orders to get them have disappeared as completely as a needle in a haystack.

"Olsen brought the story of the furs back to me in Shanghai," Burroughs went on in a rapid-fire monologue. "He saw the furs with his own eyes. Guarded by a hundred warlike Mongols, a caravan was bringing them to Urga. That was last spring.

"Olsen had some supplies the Mongols needed; bullets, gunpowder, an old Mauser. In exchange for these they gave him safe passage to Chailar, and a peek at the furs, and the story of where they were from and whom they were for.

"Those furs are a million-dollar gift for the Dalai Lama, who is to visit Urga from Lhassa, capital of Tibet, this spring. I don't have to tell you of the reverence in which all Mongols hold their spiritual leader. They will commit any crime for his blessing. And those furs have been acquired in a five-year crime wave through Mongolia, Siberia and Turkestan. They've been stored secretly at Abagatui for five years, and now they are in Urga. The Dalai Lama will have robes of silver fox, rugs of silver fox, tapestries of silver fox! There were never that many silver fox furs in one haul since time began!"

HIS voice rang with pride as he described his fantastic plan to me.

"The Dalai Lama is a glutton for gold. The Grand Sea of Wisdom has all the silver his heart desires, but not much gold, and like all rulers, he wants what he hasn't got. So I figured if we could bring a hundred thousand dollars' worth of gold bars and gold pieces, rings and trinkets, into Urga—all gold, solid gold—we might be able to persuade the Mongols to trade us the silver fox furs by persuading them the Dalai Lama would rather have the gold.

"The gold bars I got right in Shanghai, but it took three months of combing the Orient to get the right kind of trinkets.

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"We had to keep the expedition a secret. The gold would not be safe if anybody got wind of it. Olsen was for going by plane but I said no; that was too dangerous, and would be too conspicuous. Finally it was arranged. Olsen and I and two others would bring our equipment to Tsitsihar, and then start out by motor caravan for Urga. But I broke both legs in a fox hunt. Two compound fractures. Stayed in bed four months. And they had to leave without me.

"They left early in the autumn, three months ago. With Olsen were two young Germans, Rathje and Koelber. The gold they hid in a false gas tank in one of the two autos. Olsen kept in touch with me by short-wave radio.

"He knew the terrain and was friendly with the natives. But they didn't get ahead as fast as they expected. Sandstorms held them up. There were delays while they dickered over payment of *likin,* taxes exacted for passing roads and bridges, to the various tribes they passed. But at last they reached Nalaieho, five hundred miles from Urga. Olsen radioed me joyfully, 'Next week Urga. We're all in the best of health and we feel confident we'll perform this mission to everybody's satisfaction. It's cold as hell out here, but we don't mind.' That message came a month ago. And then they disappeared. Not a word from them since."

I interrupted his dogged recital of the gloomy facts, amazed at his ignorance of a jinx I thought all Old China Hands understood.

"And you have sent some men out to find them, and they vanished, too," I said.

"Yes," Burroughs said. "They disappeared, too. Three more of Olsen's best friends. Salter, a Scotchman; Ronceau, a French explorer, and Sussman, a Levantine trader."

IT was an old story, and I told Burroughs so. Men went out on those Mongolian plains in the winter and disappeared as thoroughly as a silver dollar dropped into the ocean. More men went out to find them and disappeared, too.

In the spring, the summer and the autumn men went out and came back, boasting the country wasn't dangerous in the least and asserting the Mongols were nice fellows, a bit uncivilized perhaps, but regular fellows if you knew how to handle them.

And even I, who had slept under the stars with them and trekked with their caravans to Afghanistan, didn't know the answer to the mystery, though I had sought it often.

"There's nothing you can do about it," I told Burroughs. "And I can't help you. Those men are gone. Make up your mind they are dead. You go back to Shanghai and think of another and easier way to make a million dollars."

Burroughs chewed savagely on his cigar.

"This argosy isn't ended by any way of talking, as far as I'm concerned," he said. "If those men are dead, it's my fault, and I'm going to find out why they're dead and avenge their deaths if possible. And maybe they're not dead. Maybe their radio's busted. Maybe they're sick. Maybe they're captives of some warring Mongol tribe and diplomacy can save them.

"I know where their trucks ought to be," he continued. "The second lost trio sighted their autos." He pulled a dirty notebook out of his pocket,

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thumbed the worn pages and read the penciled jottings. "Listen. This is from Salter:

"'January 3rd. Good morning, old man. Here's some news. We just sighted Olsen's autos two miles ahead on a little hill. No sign of life from this distance. We're driving that way now. In an hour we ought to be able to clear up this mystery.'

"That message came ten days ago," Burroughs added grimly.

"And that was the last you ever heard from Salter!" I interjected. "Nothing novel about that. I could name ten expeditions into Mongolia in the winter that ended in exactly the same way."

"Haven't you the slightest clue to the mystery?" he asked.

"No," I had to tell him. "And I don't intend to find out this year."

"But think of that truck out there with a hundred thousand dollars in gold hidden in the gas tank!" he stormed. "Has that g o l d been stolen?"

"I think the gold is still there," I said. "If you know the trail your unlucky friends followed, you ought to be able to retrieve the gold in the spring. My advice to you is to rent yourself a nice warm house in Harbin for two months and then make a hurried springtime trip to the spot to find the gold. Nine chances out of ten it'll still be there, for even the Mongols don't travel that caravan route in this weather."

"Why don't they?" he asked.

"They won't tell me, though I've inquired a hundred times. It's probably something to do with their religion. That's my belief."

"But those silver fox furs!" Burroughs' voice rasped out at me. "We still have a chance to get them now. The Dalai Lama will be in Urga in the spring, and it'll be too late then."

I studied his face carefully as he shouted those lustful words at me. His tiny eyes contracted with frustration. His thick lips quivered at the thought of owning all those furs. He began to bargain with me.

"I'll pay you five thousand dollars cash before we start."

"Sorry," I answered. "I certainly wouldn't take part in an attempt to get those furs. Sooner or later the word will leak out of your effort to gyp the Dalai Lama out of a million in furs for one-tenth the sum in gold. If I'm in on it the Mongols will never forgive me. Mongolia will be a closed door for me for the rest of my life. Valuable friendships I have fostered there in recent years will be snuffed out like a candle in a tornado. You can't fool with the spiritual head of the Mongols.

"They'll forgive you sometimes if you kill their war chiefs, but hands off their religion!"

"One-eighth the gold is yours if we find it," Burroughs said.

"No."

"And if we get the furs, you and whoever else is left split even on one-half of what I sell them for," the man persisted.

"Not interested."

"I'll set you up for the rest of your life!" he shouted at me.

"You're barking up the wrong tree," I told him. "There isn't the ghost of a chance I'll go. Forget it. Come on downstairs and have a drink of vodka and some tiffin."

That should have been the end of the story, but it was only the beginning.

We left the next morning for Tsitsihar to find Burroughs' six friends

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and a gas tank full of gold at the edge of the Mongolian plains.

## CHAPTER III.

### THE LOST IS FOUND.

WHY did I go? Only the gods atop Mount Olympus know the answer. Burroughs ate my food and drank my vodka and changed suddenly into the most gracious guest I ever had under my roof. He praised my house and my servants. He lauded my reputation, such as it was, in Manchuria. And not another word about the expedition.

In the afternoon I put him up at the club. We sat in a quiet corner of the bar and talked. I was sorry for his plight and sort of admired his blundering bravado. He told me about himself. A hard life at sea for many years. Skipped ship in Shanghai and determined to settle in the Orient until he had a cool million. He was a gambler. Often staked his whole fortune on a single turn of the wheel, as he was doing now.

Then, having won my friendship, he started asking my advice. The trucks, according to Salter's last report, were fifty miles past Nalaieho, on the caravan path across the Ulugui Mountains to Urga. Should he start from Tsitsihar, as the others had done? What kind of food should he take along? Would the truck he had with him stand the hard journey? How many men, besides the two he already had with him, should he recruit?

I felt sorry for him, and gave him what advice I could. Told him how to handle Mongols looking for trouble. What to do in a windstorm. How to bargain with the merchants of Urga. And, having won my friendship and gotten my advice, he began to prick my pride.

Hadn't I, who knew so much about the Orient (as some people said), even an inkling to the mystery of why men never came back from Mongolia in the winter? Did the Mongol tribes kill them and sack their caravansaries? Did the wild beasts of the country, mostly bears and wolves, attack and destroy them? Was it the cold itself that seeped into their bones and laid them low? Or was it an unknown plague?

I told him I felt certain it was none of those things. Sometimes the Mongol tribes killed travelers, but that was not often, and word of what happened always got back somehow to the China Coast. Those rare cases were not mysterious. And why should wild beasts be able to wipe out an armed expedition, watchful for unexpected attacks? The cold could be withstood if men dressed for it, as they all did who ventured into that country. And it was the healthiest place in the world in the winter—cold enough to kill off all the plague germs brewed since Adam.

"Well, then, what do you think? Can't you even hazard a guess?" Burroughs asked that question time and time again.

"I don't know, I don't know," I repeated monotonously as we downed round after round of whisky-sodas. "It may be Buddhistic black magic, for all I can say."

PATIENTLY, having pricked my pride, he worked on my vanity. It was all right, he guessed, for an archæologist to take life easy all winter in Harbin. But didn't the fast life, the women, the champagne, soften me just a little? Didn't the gambling spoil

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me for a life dedicated (at the time) to the advancement of scientific knowledge?

Why did they die out there in the winter? Why? Why? He dinned the refrain into my ears until, finally, with a whisky-logged bravado, I pushed over the table, threw my arms around his shoulder and yelled, "Can we start right now?"

And Burroughs, who, I have learned since, was able to hold more liquor than a shipful of sailors, answered, "Of course," and, "I knew you were a gentleman and a scholar!"

I guess it was a mixture of many emotions that made me go. Scientific curiosity, yes. Also a desire to show him I was as much a man as he. And, too, buried deep in my subconsciousness, the same lust for those miraculous silver fox furs that was spurring him on into the unknown.

We started that same night, in my expedition trucks. For years I had always kept the two trucks in readiness for leaving anywhere at a moment's notice. Food, fuel, arms, ammunition, scientific apparatus, warm clothes, books, first-aid supplies—everything was in its place. I even had a machine gun—an old Lewis—with ten thousand rounds of ammunition which I had carted around for good luck for ten years, though I had never used it once except in practice. I didn't know it then, but that machine gun was to be my salvation a short while later.

Goon, my Chinese assistant, had learned the secrets of radio communication under my tutelage. I arranged to send him in Harbin daily reports from my short wave set. But I told him not to try to send out a rescue expedition if my set, like all the others before me, suddenly subsided into everlasting silence.

Burroughs had two companions with him, Alvarez, a Mexican, and Selle, a Britisher from South Africa. The *taipan* from Shanghai seemed to revel in international connections. Alvarez was a tall, dark fellow, loyal to his master to the point of treachery. Selle was different. Three-quarters English and one-quarter buncom, as the saying goes, with a horrible inferiority complex. Out for himself at all times.

I didn't like them very much, but there was no sense objecting to their coming along. It was a crazy junket to start with, and anyhow we needed three men at least. Four was even better. We had two trucks to drive. Luckily, all of us were good truck chauffeurs.

I pledged Goon to secrecy, and we left Harbin without saying farewell to a soul. It was forty-five degrees below by my field thermometer when we slowly chugged our trucks across the frozen thickness of the Sungari River and headed north for Tsitsihar.

Burroughs and I were in the first truck. He drove as I craned my neck to watch for ruts. Alvarez, driving behind, made the mistake of touching the wheel with his bare hand and his forefinger almost froze solid to the wood.

In that frigid atmosphere the stars seemed to drop a canopy of menacing purple over our heads, while the rhombus moon cast an eerie light over the northern flats.

AND, as we reached the far banks of the Sungari, somewhere near by we heard the same sound that menaced us tonight—the familiar howl of one of those homeless mongrels—a foreboding howl, filling the night with auguries of disaster.

Many times since I have heard that

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howl, in my dreams and in my waking hours, and even though I didn't know that night that the mongrel's wail was the key to the mystery I sought to solve, it made me jumpy and afraid.

But Burroughs continued puffing on his inseparable stogie with admirable calm, his mittened hands glued to the jerky wheel.

"Slightly bumpy," he mouthed ironically as we bounced over a mile-deep rut.

The man had indomitable spirit. His perpetual cigar never left his mouth. His calloused, gloved hands never left the wheel, until he toppled over, exhausted, and then I carried on to prove my mettle. Alvarez and Selle followed in their master's wake like so many sheep dogs. Selle got sick. Alvarez's hand, torn by his bare flesh's contact with the wheel, got frost-bitten in the bargain.

From Tsitsihar to Erdini over the Khingan Mountains we bounced and jerked in five days and nights. I say nights because we traveled after dark, and when we stopped to throw ourselves into our sleeping bags we slept in fitful starts.

I begged Burroughs to rest in Erdini, but he stubbornly refused. His jaw went forward, and so did the trucks.

There wasn't a living thing on that plateau in the winter. The foxes, bears, deer and wolves had migrated to warmer climes. So had every Mongol who had a pony to carry him, pushing his herds south. Riding through that lonely waste was like traveling around the North Pole, with a strange, sinking feeling in your heart that you were the last living thing in a frozen world.

We pushed on. Through a dust-storm. Through a gale that hit our faces like a knockout punch. Through a sleetstorm, and finally through a blizzard that made the caravan path we followed indistinguishable and forced us to travel by compass through a world as white as cotton batting.

Then, one morning, we sighted the lost trucks. Came upon them suddenly. Almost completely covered with ice and snow, they stood on an elevation in an orderly row of four.

Burroughs' cigar popped fire like a Roman candle as he skidded a reckless course toward the lost expeditions.

## CHAPTER IV.

### DESERT MYSTERY.

THEY were untouched by marauding bands. This we were able to note before we even ground to a halt at their sides. Their doors were shut. Nothing had been removed.

Pointing toward Urga, all four trucks presented a ghostly picture of frustrated ambition.

"I knew it, I knew it!" Burroughs shouted joyfully, forgetful of the six men who were nowhere in sight. "I knew we would find that gold. Look—the first two trucks were Olsen's, the last two Salter's. The gold ought to be in a gas tank under the second car in line."

Alvarez, Selle and I staggered wearily after Burroughs as he ploughed on foot through the gale. The most ghastly expression dominated the face of that man. Cupidity. Lust for his gold. Off came his mittens as he threw himself on the ground under the second truck. A key from his mackinaw pocket flashed in his blue-veined hands. He turned a faucet under the gas tank and the gasoline dripped forth onto the snow.

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But there was only a sham coating of gas in that tank. It stopped flowing after gushing out a quart; it lessened to a drip. Burroughs' eager hands pushed the key into a false side, turned it, and yanked it out. We were all down on our hands and knees around him by that time. And we saw the gold. Gold bars and gold objects. Dripping gasoline, but complete and intact.

I'll always remember the triumphant bubbles of laughter that gushed from Burroughs' throat as he lay sprawled on his belly out in the middle of nowhere looking at his regained fortune.

"It's safe!" he shrieked into the gale. "And I'm safe again. I'm not a pauper. I'm rich!"

We were crouching on the northwestern side of the truck and the wind coming from that direction hit the auto's broad side and smacked back into our faces like a million ricocheting bullets. I crouched lower to examine the gold. Then I lifted my gaze to Burroughs.

And my eyes, looking through the undercarriage of the truck to the leeward side, southeast, lighted on an apparition I shall never forget if I die more deaths than a Maltese cat. A thing that brought pinpricks of gooseflesh to my body, a horrified tingling to my scalp—

Inside a barricade of human bones a frozen man sat grinning at me!

He was quite dead, not fifteen yards from where I crouched in unbelieving horror. I closed my eyes to eradicate the sight. Was it a mirage? Was I sick, tired, mad? I opened my eyes again.

Set off as on a movie screen by the restricted view from the undercarriage, the frozen man leered at me. A pistol was clutched firmly in his bony fingers. His elbows rested on two human skulls. He was fully clad, but wore no hat.

Something about my rigid, petrified position caught Burroughs' greedy eyes. He turned his face reluctantly from the gold. I saw him start as his eyes rested on the gruesome image.

"Salter!" he shrieked.

Alvarez crossed himself. The color drained from Selle's cheeks. Crawling under the truck, Alvarez, Selle and I staggered to our feet and ran toward the frozen remains of the leader of the second vanished expedition. But not Burroughs. Glancing over my shoulder, I saw him carefully lock the gas tank containing the gold. Then he raised his ponderous body from under the auto and lumbered after us.

THERE was no question about the fact that Salter, sitting there fully clothed, with the grin of a frozen man lighting his ice-preserved face, had scraped his five friends' bones together with his own hands to build a barricade to protect himself from *something*.

Salter's pistol clutched in his hand rested on a skull; his back pressed against another skull, and more skulls, arm bones, back bones, thigh bones, and all the other bones that go to make up five human bodies, snugly fitted around him, almost up to his chest.

What had happened to those six men? That was the burning question in the minds of all of us. The Mongols weren't cannibals, no matter what lese may be said against them. And even a horde of wolves, how could they attack and destroy two such firmly protected expeditions? What unseen, unknown menace drove them

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from the safety of their trucks, unarmed, into the untenanted plains? Why didn't Salter meet the same fate as his companions? And what made him, finally, desert the truck when he was the last man alive for such a grotesque fortification as the bones of his companions?

It was terribly quiet out on those plains. Quiet and barren and cold. And there were absolutely no clues.

Alvarez, who had been scouting around, rifle firmly held in his hand, returned to report that not a shred of evidence was anywhere in sight. Not a stitch of clothes of those five skeletons. Not a single belonging. The snow, of course, had carried all bloodstains and footprints into the ground. But, as I told you, those bones were on the leeward side of the truck. Not much wind hit them. There should have been *something* around; a handkerchief, a pencil, a torn shirt, a boot, hair—something to make us feel that their bodies, fully clothed, hadn't just been yanked off their bones and carried away.

Selle came back from an inspection of the four trucks. He hadn't much to report. The trucks hadn't been touched. The men in Olsen's expedition had been having dinner in Number 1 Truck, apparently, when the *thing* drew them magically from their posts, unarmed, and destroyed them. Their rifles and ammunition lay concealed under a tarpaulin, and either they hadn't had the desire to use them, or hadn't had the chance. The radio sets were closed. Salter's trucks were just as unproductive of clues.

Salter and his two companions either came on the Olsen trio alive and marched to death with them, or else found them dead and met the same fate while standing, horrified, over their bones. There was no way of really telling.

"Salter was a canny Scotsman," Burroughs said. "He never went unarmed anywhere, even through the streets of Shanghai."

So we inspected Salter's body; yanked him out of the nest he had built and delved into his frozen clothes and carcass. His rifle was black, its barrel grimy.

Three hundred rounds of ammunition he had carried around his waist had been used—on what? His was plainly a case of freezing to death. His body was unscarred and well preserved. Why had he chosen to freeze to death in the midst of his friends' bones? What *thing* had prevented him from returning from the truck and comparative safety even after his friends had been divested of their flesh?

My head ached from mulling the possibilities through my feverish brain.

WE buried those bones. It was hard work with pick and shovel, but finally we had them all underground, including Salter's body, and no crosses to mark the spot, either.

"You have your gold back," I told Burroughs. "I was promised one-eighth if you found it. You can keep my share. Let's head for home."

But there was no such thing as turning back for Burroughs. He had his eye on that million-dollar haul of silver fox. We had gotten this far safely, he said, so why not risk it on to Urga? Perhaps once there I would be able to solve the mystery of those dead men.

"I want no glory," I told him. "I merely want to be back in Harbin. I'll

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crack this mystery wide open some day, but this is not the time to do it. We're not prepared, and we're not going about it the right way. Your heart is set on a fortune in furs, mine on returning to my house and servants."

Of course, we went on. They were three to one. Alvarez and Selle were "yes men" to anything Burroughs said. They made me understand it would be pretty nasty to be left alone out there with my two trucks while they went on in Olsen's machine.

So we made for Urga. Through a vast stillness that seeped into the souls of all of us except Burroughs, who, I think, hadn't been provided with a soul by some divine mistake. The unsolvable mystery of the buried bones hung over our heads like the Sword of Damocles. At what moment would *we* be stricken, hypnotized away from the safety of our trucks, to see our flesh and clothes whisked away from our underpinnings by some unknown force?

That thought sat on my shoulders like a ghost going for a free ride as our trucks rolled over the Ulugui Mountains through a tempest of incredible violence, slid down coarse stretches of scrub and bounced into Urga on a minimum of cylinders.

## CHAPTER V.

### THE FURS.

BURROUGHS chuckled with self-satisfied delight at our feat of beating the bugaboo of Mongolia. One moment he laughed out loud at the startled Mongols who ran out of their shacks to gaze amazed at our incoming expedition. The next moment he cursed like a pirate as the incredulous natives almost ran under the wheels of our trucks.

Defiant? The man could have been pounding his fist on a table at a board of directors' meeting in Shanghai for all the difference in his manner.

"I'm going to get those furs," he said. "And I can handle these Mongols."

He had forgotten completely about solving the mystery of the death of Olsen and the others. But not I. When we ground to a halt on the main thoroughfare of Urga, and Burroughs bellowed a demand to see the Kutukta Lama, spiritual head of Mongolia and second in importance only to the Dalai Lama of Tibet, I saw several Mongols smile insidiously.

I had seen that kind of smile on Oriental faces before, and I didn't like it. It was an innocuous smile, the kind the Orientals plaster on their faces just before witnessing one of their favorite exquisite tortures, a smile that said, "All right, stranger, have your way, but if you only knew what was coming!—"

I didn't know. That was the trouble. Burroughs didn't know, and didn't care. That was the difference between Burroughs and me.

Well, it was easy enough to see the Kutukta Lama. If a man from Mars dropped in on America, President Roosevelt would see him, I guess.

And that's how the Kutukta of Lama felt about us.

We were ushered into the main Lamasery, Burroughs and I, while Alvarez and Selle guarded the trucks from a swarm of curious natives.

And while Burroughs stood by belligerently, fuming at not being able to talk the Mongol tongue, and wondering if I was saying what he had told me to say, I bowed and scraped and whispered incredible words to the Assistant Incarnation of Buddha.

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"A thousand excuses, sire, for breaking in upon your repose and meditation, but we, though we be but the merest barbarians, are here to pay our respects to the coming visit of the Dalai Lama. We have brought a gift from other lands from our subservient ruler. Across your mighty mountains and broad plains we have come respectfully. May we have the honor of presenting this gift to you, Most Reverend Soul, to pass on to that Incarnation of the Divine Essence, Grand Sea of Wisdom and Living Buddha, the Dalai Lama?"

The Kutukta Lama's short head bobbed up and down as he listened to me struggle through those flowery words. His yellow-skinned face broke out into a thousand wrinkled smiles, and he accepted.

"What have you brought, O unimportant men?" he asked.

"Gold," I whispered.

I'LL never forget what happened to that face. His small nose trembled. His black, oblique eyes popped out at me, and his long, jet black horsetail hair stood up an inch.

"A gold ring?" he inquired, rising to his feet with amazing alacrity.

"Hundreds of gold rings," I answered. "Gold bars for you to make what ornaments you will. Gold brooches. Gold trinkets for your praying wheels; gold for your feast bowls."

You would have enjoyed seeing the Kutukta Lama's ungainly body swathed in robes swaying eagerly toward where I stood. Burroughs saw a smile on the High Priest's face, and shot at me, "How's it look?"

"We're halfway there," I said in English, as the Kutukta Lama intertwined his arm with mine and said in Mongolian, "Show me."

I showed him. We drove the trucks slambang into the most sacred part of the Lamasery. The truck with the gold of course we had taken with us, abandoning one of my two trucks where we found those six dead men. So now Burroughs fiddled with the fake gas tank, drained the gas and started pulling out the gold.

The priesthood comprises one-half the population of Urga, and they were nearly all there, as goggle-eyed as slant-eyed people can get when Burroughs' gasoline-soaked hands placed the gold at the feet of the Kutukta Lama.

Their tongues clicked in amazement. Their necks craned in delight. Their eyes rolled in wonderment and their hands shook to touch the yellow metal.

You may think it sounds crazy, but that's the way it worked. That's the way we got the furs. Having accepted our prodigious gift, the Kutukta Lama was constrained by ironbound custom to offer us a gift in return. There could be no hedging, according to their religion, and I knew it.

I was prepared when the High Priest said to me, "I will be kind enough to permit you to bring back to your Inferior Ruler, your Subservient Princeling, a gift from me, spiritual ruler of this Divine Kingdom. Name what you will, and you shall have it."

"I humbly crave," I said, my heart beating furiously with suspense, "the smallest section of one of the least important of your silver fox furs."

"Follow your Exalted Leader," he commanded happily.

We followed him. Through cold stone temples. Into cavernous cellars. Past dank, dark rooms. Sloshing through icy water ankle deep, we followed him into the deepest depths of that monastery's cellar.

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And here, built above the water, was a strong room. Behind the torches of two priests who followed the Kutukta Lama we entered eagerly, Burroughs and I, and saw our dreams come true.

There they were, five times as many more than we expected, hanging on wooden racks as far as the eye could see, glistening, begging to be caressed, radiating white sheens of light—ten thousand silver foxes!

Burroughs chuckled that diabolical laugh of his again as he ran his hands softly, quickly, over those furs. He was panting with accumulated tension, and I guess I was too. I suspect that at that moment I was just as greedy as he. Those furs were too much for my moral code; a quarter that many would have shattered the way I felt then. Do you know the things you think of when you dream of being a millionaire? Yachts, liveried servants, beautiful women, automobiles?

I thought of them all at that moment.

THE Kutukta Lama was breathing in my ear, "Choose which you will and they are yours."

I had enough presence of mind left to follow that pattern of Oriental manners I knew so well. "I will have the smallest one," I said.

Lucky Burroughs did not understand Mongolian. He would have killed me, I think, for his Occidental mind could not have understood the way the Oriental mind works. It took two hours of being polite, standing in that frigid cellar stronghold, to get what I wanted. Two hours of scraping, face-saving and bending over backwards. The Kutukta Lama insisted I take them all; I insisted one was enough. It ended by my accepting (humbly!) one-half of those furs—five thousand silver foxes worth, I judged, about a million dollars at the present market—if we could get them back to the China Coast.

Once we had the furs, Burroughs was tense and nervous, eager to start back.

"The Mongols have treated us well," he said to me, a strange light in his eyes. "Ask the Kutukta Lama for a safe escort back to Tsitsihar. Tell him I'll pay well."

I asked, knowing in advance what the answer would be. The Kutukta Lama's almond eyes narrowed, but his face didn't change his innocent mien.

"Escort? Ah, my loyal subjects, you need no escort. You have brought a gift for the Dalai Lama. The word has gone out. You have no cause to worry. Mongolia is safe to your party. No men will harm you."

*No men.*

"We are not afraid of *men*," I said, bowing low and smiling patiently, "nor of the cold, nor the wild beasts, nor sickness. But other white men have perished in Mongolia in the winter, for some mysterious reason. Why is that so?"

It wasn't polite to tell him about the six men who just died. Anyway, he probably knew all about it. I could only ask for information and hope to get it.

But I didn't get it. He was kind, but persistent. All the Mongols were needed to prepare for the Dalai Lama's reception. Mongolia was safe to us. He wished us the best of fortune.

His eyes shifted. He wouldn't look me straight in the face. There was something he couldn't talk about, something that terrified him as much as it did me.

And a thought began to grow in my mind. It wandered about my head

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while I tried in vain to clarify it. My instincts suddenly told me I was on the threshold of solving that mystery, but I couldn't quite get hold of it.

Urga in the winter was different from Urga I had visited in the spring, summer, autumn. What was the difference? Something was missing. What was missing? What was not in Urga in the winter that had been there in other seasons?

You must have had the experience of trying to catch a thought that eluded you. The effort exhausted me. What, what, what? That question joined the ghost that perched on my shoulders as we started back, unescorted, across the mountains and plains, for the civilization that would be our slave if we could reach it.

FOR three days, as we drove those two trucks across the Ulugui Mountains, Burroughs treated me with a respect I didn't like. I still don't know exactly what his plan was. I imagine Burroughs' idea was to form an alliance with Alvarez and Selle to do away with me; then form another alliance with Alvarez to kill Selle; and, at the end, butcher Alvarez with his own strong hands and ride into Shanghai alone with all those furs.

It became obvious after a while. We were traveling in pairs, Burroughs and I in the truck with the furs, and Alvarez and Selle in the supply truck. There wasn't any reason for the three of them to get together and exclude me unless they were hatching a plot. But they did get together every night after dinner. Sort of walked off and held a powwow out in the snow. I smoked my pipe alone, in a torment, wondering when the blow would be struck; knowing that nobody would ever find my body chucked into a ravine.

One night, when we camped near a ruined temple, I tried to send my daily radio report to Goon in Harbin, and found the radio didn't work. Burroughs just smiled and shrugged when I told him. Later, I lay with my eyes wide open, realizing I was a doomed man. It was useless to turn back or go forward afoot. Those mountains would swallow me as completely as a whale engulfs a minnow. Stealing one of the trucks in the night was out of the question. I couldn't get away in time. Burroughs slept at my side, and would kill me. The idea of a sudden attack on them I dismissed as impractical. I might kill one of them, but in the end the chances are they would kill me.

I decided my only chance was to try to forestall their killing me until we reached Nalaieho. At Nalaieho I would disappear somehow, live with the Mongols until the spring and then ride a pony back to Harbin.

I was thankful when a cold dawn broke upon my wide-open eyes. Burroughs hadn't got any sleep that night, either. As soon as I left my sleeping bag he was out of his. Ingratiatingly he bid me a good morning and went out of our truck to awaken Alvarez and Selle.

The three of them gathered for a pre-breakfast confab in a clearing about fifty feet away from my truck. Peeking through a window in the van, I saw them conversing in strained, eager tones. No doubt in my mind what they were talking about.

And then, suddenly, I saw a little dog appear shyly from behind some snow-covered scrub. The cutest little mongrel puppy I had ever seen. Something was wrong with its foreleg, and it limped gingerly toward them. They all saw it at once. Burroughs bent down to pat it.

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Something was stirring in my mind —straining, pushing my brain to seek the answer to a mighty question. And in a flash I had it! What was the difference between Urga in the winter and Urga the rest of the year? Dogs! That was it. Eight months of the year Urga was as full of mongrels as it was of Buddhistic priests.

But there hadn't been a single dog in Urga on our recently concluded visit. Incredible, now that I realized it. Mongolian villages were usually full of mongrels—but we hadn't seen a single dog from Tsitsihar to Urga!

Another dog, a mongrel female, stepped from behind the same scrub and walked slowly, peacefully, to her puppy. The mother seeking her lost child. Burroughs picked up the puppy and presented it to its mother. Alvarez and Selle knelt down and patted the dog.

And the dog, in a swift change of character, from a gentle lamb to ferocious tiger, snapped her jaw and bit Alvarez's hand. When her teeth unlocked and she sprang back, Alvarez's hand was a mangled pulp.

The Mexican yelled in agony. Selle kicked the dog. Burroughs whipped out his automatic and fired. He killed the dog with one shot.

Then he and Selle started dragging Alvarez, writhing in agony on the snow-covered ground, to the truck. I sat tense with horror as a terrible truth dawned on me.

## CHAPTER VI.

### MASSACRE.

IT was a horrible truth, made more horrible by what happened in the next fateful moment. They never reached the truck. They never got close to it. Not more than ten steps did they drag Alvarez's pain-racked body, when the deluge struck them.

A deluge of dogs. Thousands of them. Millions, it seemed to my awe-struck eyes. Over the crest of the hill where our trucks stood in the clearing those hordes of Mongolian mongrels came charging out of nowhere. Some as small as toy terriers, some as big as wolves, they leaped from the north, the south, the east, and the west, barking, whining, howling, yelping, moaning in a blood-curdling din.

In a flash they pounced on Alvarez's limp body and devoured the Mexican before he could cry out his agony.

Burroughs and Selle fired their pistols into that horde, but little good that did. It was as useless as a slingshot at Verdun.

Above the din came Burroughs' bellowing voice. "Farnsworth, for God's sake help us!"

I realized with dismay that the only thing that could have helped them—and me—was in the other truck. The machine gun. And there was no use trying to reach that other truck. By this time the mountain was black with dogs. Not wild dogs. Not the *dhole* or the raccoon-like wild dog that are known to habitate the Asian wilds.

These were all mongrels from Mongolian villages and cities.

Naturalists say there are two hundred varieties of dogs. Well, every single v a r i e t y was represented in the mixed blood of that starving, mad army of canines. Terrier, poodle, chow-chow, fox hound, bloodhound, greyhound, mastiff, spaniel, and almost every other dog-name that could come to your tongue.

Clawing, kicking, snarling, they filled that fateful clearing, leaping over each other's bodies in their fran-

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tic rush for human flesh. Do you know how sometimes you are hypnotized to look your fate straight in the eye? That's how I felt. I couldn't turn my eyes.

I watched Alvarez's body being torn limb from limb by greedy fangs. Incredible, the way that Mexican's body disappeared. One minute he was moaning on the ground. Not more than a minute later he was food in the bellies of a hundred mongrels, licked clean as a Thanksgiving drumstick. And all that was left of him was his shattered skeleton. The mystery of the Mongolian plain had lifted. But would I ever bring it back alive to civilization?

I thought not. Selle was screaming now. A dog had bitten his shooting hand, and the gun was lost somewhere in the pack. With furious oaths the South African kicked vainly at the jaws of the mongrels snapping at his knees. One leaped at his throat. The gore spouted a crimson fountain that nearly hit the truck where I stood almost paralyzed with fear.

Selle went down. The dogs covered him in a flash. The next minute what had been the mortal Selle was in the bellies of a hundred dogs, and only his bones remained to convince me the thing wasn't a nightmare.

Burroughs fought with all the fury of his American heritage. Long since he had thrown away his gun, realizing the few dogs he killed with it did not help him much. He had a dagger in his hand now, with a blade as big as a butcher's knife. Probably the knife meant for my gizzard, but I couldn't help admiring the way he used it.

He had plotted to kill me, but I forgot about that as I watched him with mounting admiration fighting off his destiny for a few tragedy-filled minutes in that clearing. I wished I could help him, but the day before he had prevented that himself. I forgot to tell you that he had stolen my guns. Just to make doubly certain he could do away with me.

THOSE mongrels were doing away with him now, and he must have realized it. He was fighting grimly. Did I say the clearing was black with dogs? That's too modest. The world was black with dogs. As far as my eyes could scan, those mongrels covered the terrain so thickly that I couldn't see the snow on the ground.

Burroughs was covered with blood, his own and that of countless mongrels that plunged at his throat. The man was possessed of superhuman strength. Standing in blood, he wielded that knife like the executioner in a Chicago slaughter house.

*Grrr!* A dog jumped for his throat. *Swish!* His knife described an arc. *Thud!* That dog fell lifeless at Burroughs' knees, his throat a spouting stream.

In the bedlam and the stench the Shanghai *taipan* stood erect and defiant, a heroic figure. His eyes blazed. His lips were two narrow streaks of stubborn flesh. No word passed through those lips. He had realized the futility of calling for me to help him. He was silent.

His hands threshed like windmills. Turning, twisting, ducking, jumping, he wielded that death-dealing knife.

And the dogs, pressing close in ever-increasing numbers, grew more ferocious every minute they were thwarted. Finally a black-coated mongrel caught Burroughs in the nape of the neck. Imagine a rabbit punch in a boxing ring. Imagine spikes in the box-

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ing glove that delivered it. That will give you some idea of the force of that blow. Burroughs pitched forward. Another dog leaped for his eyes.

I closed mine. I heard a shriek rise above the yipping of the mongrels. When I opened my eyes a moment later Burroughs was history.

Then that army of hunger-crazed canines made for me!...

I HOPE all of you have peace and quiet when *your* time comes to die. As for me, I was prepared to die in a world filled with the most blood-curdling din it has ever been a man's fate to hear. I didn't know whether or not I was safe in the closed compartment of the truck. I suspected I wasn't.

In waves of unrushing fury those dogs battered their heads against the sides of the truck. I can't ever forget the hideous noises that poured out of their throats. There were hundreds on the roof of the truck, hundreds under the carriage, and thousands on all four sides. Their claws and fangs scraped the van, sending echoes of thunder into the veritable prison cell where I sat trembling, knife in hand.

Expecting every moment to see a mongrel's jaw thrust into that cell, wild nightmares ran through my brain. At last the tension became unbearable. I couldn't sit there another moment and wait for those noises to change into dogs. I would have died from the suspense. I decided to make a break for the other truck and the machine gun.

Holding my knife in my teeth, I started the truck, shifted into reverse and backed down a slight slope to the second truck. Those dogs were not afraid of anything. They attacked the moving truck, snipping at the heavy rubber tires, jumping at the chains. I moved back twenty yards, and must have killed at least a thousand of those beasts who didn't know what the fear of death meant.

Finally I maneuvered my truck to the side of the other. I shut off the engine and sat still for a moment, wondering how in blazes I would accomplish the transition from one truck to another.

I KNOW it sounds easy. Just open one door. Step on the running board of the other truck, open the other door, jump in and bang the door shut. Very easy, no doubt. Except that the mongrels were thick around me. They stood on the motor covering, snarling at me through the windshield, destructive, ferocious, inhuman animals, intent upon only one thing—my flesh and blood.

For twenty yards in front of me the ground was strewn with the dead and half dead bodies of the mongrels ground under the wheels of my retreating truck.

Yes, I saw my chance and took it. And made it. It was like jumping over a ravine, with the bright fires of hell burning beneath me. *Bang!* The door of the first truck was shut, and I was on the running board of the second. Those mongrels leaped after me with unbelievable swiftness. One grisly veteran buried his fangs in my leg. I still have the scars. But I didn't mind the pain very much then. What I was interested in was slitting that dog's throat, which I did with a deft sweep of my knife. Another second and I was safe inside the front of the second truck. Still another second the door banged shut and I breathed a deep sigh of relief.

There was one thought in my mind then, to kill those dogs, drive them off

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the road and make a quick get-away for Nalaieho. A sudden calmness came over me. It was the calmness following intense fear and excitement. My nerves had got their second wind, and I smiled grimly as I set up the machine gun.

Even though a man plots to kill you, you will fight for him when a common enemy outside the ken of humankind attacks you. That's what I learned as I pointed the muzzle of that old Lewis into the thickest part of that foaming army of hounds.

*Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat.* That was for Burroughs' immortal soul. *Rat-tat-tat-tat!* For Alvarez. For Selle. For Olsen, Rathje, Koelber, Sussman, and Ronceau, who had been lured unsuspecting from their trucks by mongrels with human intelligence, and licked clean to their marrow before they knew what was happening. *Rat-tat-tat-tat!* For Salter, who covered himself with the bones of his friends in an effort to escape the fury of the scourge of Mongolia.

YOU should have seen those mongrels fall by the wayside. I laughed like a madman to see what havoc that machine gun was causing. A ton of dynamite hurled into the thick of Chicago's stockyard couldn't have done more damage. Every shot was a hit, and I didn't have to be a good marksman, either.

It was as if the heavens had hailed bullets. As my Lewis roared out its revenge they fell back like sea waves, moaning, yelping, crying, wailing. New waves engulfed me, only to be repelled by another barrage.

And then they began to leave. At first in pairs and then small groups. Then finally the remainder of the pack turned tail and ran swiftly away from the truck. But not before they picked up for trophies every stitch of the mangled clothes of Burroughs, Alvarez and Selle.

I sat and watched them disappear over the horizon.

It was an awful let-down, to be crouching there, the nozzle of the machine gun sticking through the half-opened door. I slammed the door tight, sat there inertly, and stared through the windshield at the wreckage I had wrought.

That was not the worst of it. Believe me it was not! I sat there, dazed, gazing all alone at those human bones, when suddenly there came to my ears from over the hill a concerted chorus of dismal wailing such as all the symphonic orchestras in the world combined could not muster.

What an eerie, sad, inhuman, heart-depressing cry! A sound my ears have never permitted me to forget. A sound that makes my heart stop, my hair stand on end, my eyes bulge.

Out of their throats it welled across those barren hills. Throbbing with an indictment of the Mongols who made them the man-eaters, outcasts, and homeless wanderers over a frozen waste they were.

My hands and feet acted automatically; stepped on the starter, released the brake, shifted the gears, and pressed on the gas.

I jerked away from that clearing. Bumped three-quarters of the distance down that mountain and skidded the rest. Straight through that day and night down the Ulugui Mountains; straight through numberless nights and days I drove as if Satan and his cohorts were in the vacant seat beside me.

But the howling of those pitiful mongrels stuck in my eardrums every

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minute of the way, and when Goon, countermanding my orders and starting out on a one-man expedition to find me, located me driving, half blind from lack of sleep, three hundred miles from Tsitsihar, he said I was the most exhausted madman he had ever seen.

And not for several days did I recall the furs—that fortune in silver-tipped skin which I had left in the other truck. In my moment of madness impelled by a wild urge to get away from that scene of horror I had forgotten about them.

## CHAPTER VII.

### THE REASON.

FARNSWORTH sat limp in his chair, staring entranced at the logs blazing in the fireplace. His voice, fading off all at once, left a gap in that room I wished something could fill. His old friend the fur trader, the Shanghai banker, and I fidgeted in our easy chairs and wished the boy would bring another round of drinks.

"So," came our host's peroration from a grimly twisted mouth, "you know why it's dangerous to travel in Mongolia in the wrong kind of weather." He was speaking to the banker. "You know now why I don't like dogs, why I shoot them when they howl that certain way, why my friend here can't go out to seek his furs up north until it gets a little warmer.

"Man-eating dogs! And man-eaters through no wish of their own. That's why the Kutukta Lama and every other Mongolian was reluctant to give me a clue to that mystery. They're ashamed of themselves. Ashamed because they drive those dogs out of their villages in the winter, when food is scarce.

"Mongols don't care much about dogs in any kind of weather. The pony is their pet. But they tolerate the dog in warm weather because the sun brightens up their nature. In the winter they're cruel and relentless."

The archæologist stood up and paced his study. "Who can blame the dogs? You know to what extremes those sensitive animals will go. Isn't it natural that they'll gather in a pack, use their almost human intelligence to catch men off their guard and eat them if there's nothing else to eat? We all take for granted that a dog can help a man. It sounds and is reasonable that a dog can also fight a man."

The fur trader interrupted. "I know you saved my life with the discovery you made years ago, and I've thanked you many times. So have thousands of others. But this is the first time I've heard you tell the whole story, and I confess I don't quite get it all—I mean, this man Salter. What in damnation's sake made him pull the bones of his best friends around him? Why wasn't he devoured like the others?"

Farnsworth stood with his back to the brightly burning logs and his face grew gaunt. "I've seen it in my mind's eye many times," he said. "Can't you picture Salter and Ronceau and Sussman coming upon the bones of the Olsen trio out there on the plain? Can't you visualize the horror? Can't you picture them bending over those crumbled skeletons and searching for clues just as I did?" He flashed a sardonic smile. "Salter was away from that no man's land when the dogs attacked Ronceau and Sussman. Out a way, searching for a clue. He heard the din and rushed back. He saw Sussman disappear. He saw Ronceau torn to pieces.

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"And then he saw the dogs withdraw. He heard them wail that awful note of theirs. The trucks were haunted for him. He was mortally scared to try to get to them. Yet he had to protect himself from a sudden attack. There wasn't a shred of anything on that clearing except his friends' bones. Maybe he went a little mad. He used them to build a small fortress. Drew them closer around his freezing body as darkness approached. Covered himself with those bones when night came. Fired the remainder of his bullets at ghosts and shadows and that omnipresent wail. Smiled with relief when his body grew numb and death came."

I WAS glad Farnsworth's quiet, efficient Chinese boy broke in to serve another round of whisky.

"The dogs evidently never came back," Farnsworth said after we all gulped down our drinks. "With their bellies full the dogs wouldn't bother Salter. They don't kill because they like to, as the grisly bear does. They kill only because they're hungry."

The banker cut in, all excited. "But what happened to those silver fox furs? Don't tell me you left them in that deserted truck."

A merry, intense fire burned in Farnsworth's eyes. In a flash he was down at the banker's feet, whisking the rug away from under his shiny shoes.

"I went back and got them," our host said. "Goon and I drove back, impelled by the same greed that sent Burroughs out. I found those furs, and we got them back to Harbin. Here's one of them!" He held out the fur rug for all of us to see.

"Dyed cat!" gasped the fur trader, after a quick examination of the fur.

"Yes." Farnsworth was laughing. "The Kutukta Lama got the best of that bargain after all. All of it was dyed cat. Some Chinese traders bought those furs from the Japanese, and sold them to the Mongols. The Chinese were master dyers long before the Occident knew that secret."

The banker groaned at the thought of that shattered dream of wealth.

"It seems to me," he said, "that as long as your trip was a farce you shouldn't have it in for dogs as much as you do. After all, it may be all right to kill them out in Mongolia, but why kill them in Changchun? There's certainly no danger of being eaten by dogs here."

An incredulous look occupied our host's face. Finally something dawned on him. He got his searchlight again, opened the window, beckoned to us.

The light played around the dog and, not more than ten feet away, rested on a human skull!

"I thought you all saw it the first time," Farnsworth said. "That skull was the head of some poor coolie in the Chinese City two hours ago. Some poor, hungry coolie, as homeless as that dog I shot who ate him." He turned to his Chinese boy. "Goon," he said, "tell these gentlemen how many Chinese are killed by dogs each winter in this city."

So that was Goon! That quiet, unobtrusive servant; a man you'd think would be scared to move a mile away from his home and family.

Goon was smiling at us. "Many," he said simply. Then he shook his head back and forth and grinned. "When dog bites man, that maybe not news. But when dog eats man, shoes and all, that, I think, masters, is, how you say, sensation!"

THE END

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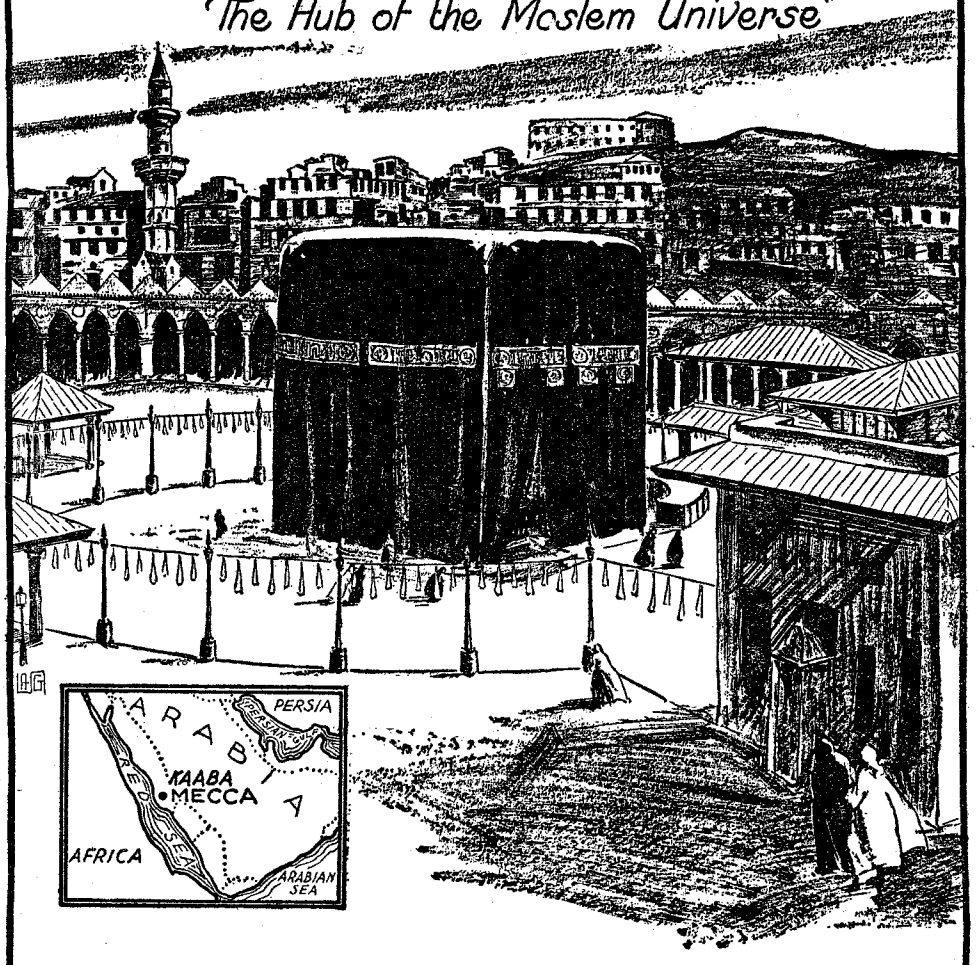
# The KAABA at Mecca

## "The Hub of the Moslem Universe"




MECCA was a holy place long before the days of Mohammed, for the Arabs believed that the black stone, now built into the Kaaba, or "cube," standing in its center, was given to Abraham by the archangel Gabriel. When Mohammed founded his religion, he took advantage of the established sanctity of Mecca and adopted the Kaaba as his own, merely destroying the heathen idols which the Arabs had ranged about it.

The Kaaba, standing within a large sacred mosque, has been rebuilt several times, but without radical change. It is a rough windowless cube forty feet each way, banded with silver. In its southeast angle is embedded the famous stone which is kissed by thousands of devout Mohammedans who make the pilgrimage to Mecca. A holy carpet richly embellished with silver covers the stone structure and is renewed every year. The interior is of the richest marble, gold and silver.

Mecca is a mountain-locked and inaccessible town, and, were it not for the black stone of the Kaaba, it would be deserted now that commerce no longer travels in caravans. The holy stone still draws thousands of the faithful every year to Mecca.



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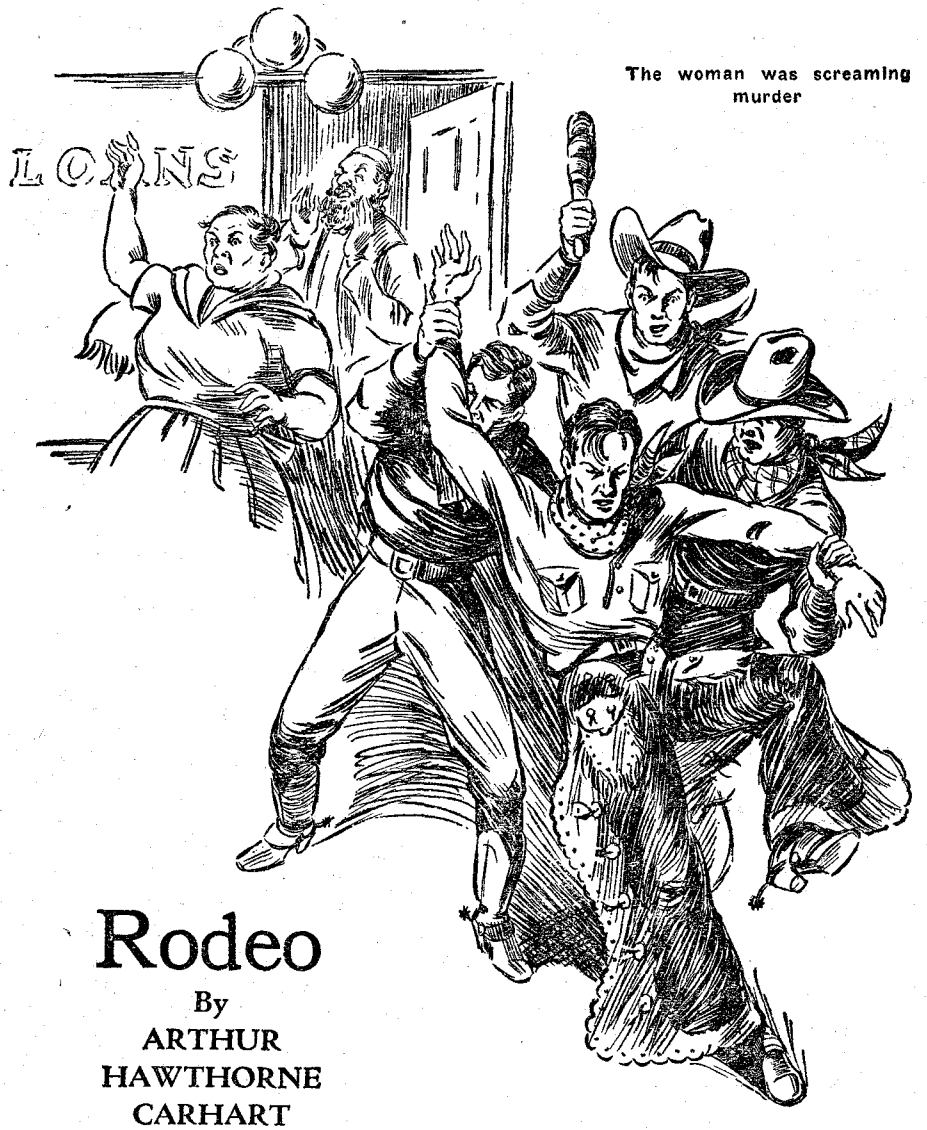

The woman was screaming murder

# Rodeo

By
ARTHUR
HAWTHORNE
CARHART

*When a cowboy rides his luck nothing he can do is wrong, but when his luck throws him—*

**THIS STORY HAS JUST BEGUN—START IT NOW**

HI LOWE, not yet old in years, but old in experience and bitterness, was hitting the comeback trail, and finding it a rocky road. Hi had been a champion roper at western rodeos until the time he thought Anson Bagwell, one of the judges, had been unfair with him. Hi started to take Bagwell apart right there, and right there he was barred from Association rodeos for two years for attacking an official.

Liquor and women didn't do Hi much good during the next two years, but he made one friend for whose sake he tried a comeback. That was young Sixty Jones, who worshiped Hi and stood by him.

**This story began in the Argosy for November 9**



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Then came the Frontier Days rodeo at Cheyenne, Wyoming, in which Sixty was entered in the riding contests and Hi in the roping. Bagwell was again a judge, and he found opportunity to tamper with Sixty's saddle just before the youngster rode a vicious horse. Sixty was thrown and trampled, and Hi, half full of liquor, again attacked Bagwell.

Sixty was taken to the hospital and Hi was taken to jail. For reasons of his own, old Andy Wallace, who furnished stock for the show, got Hi out of jail and promised to get Sixty the best medical care if Hi would straighten out.

That night Dawn Wallace, Andy's daughter, came to Hi and asked him to help find her brother, Hub, who was on a spree. Hi got Hub and sobered him up. Meanwhile Bagwell was found dead in Hi's car, several miles out of town. Thinking that Dawn, who had been using Hi's car, was responsible, Hi took the blame. However, Dawn got Eva Lord, Bagwell's sweetheart, to confess that she was guilty.

When the Wallace group prepared to move on to the next rodeo, orders were given that Hi was to go to the Wallace ranch and report to Steve Capps, in charge during Andy Wallace's absence.

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## CHAPTER VII.

### LOST LUCK.

"POWDER RIVER! Let 'er buck!"

Night in Old Cheyenne. Champions had been crowned this, the last day of the show, and now it was time to celebrate.

Carnival spilled through the town. Frontier Days was finishing with a bang; with more fun than you could pack in two panniers and a dude bedroll.

Even tourists in linen suits and plus-fours caught the spirit; put on big hats, and knotted silk handkerchiefs around their necks.

"Pow—der River! She's a mile wide, an' an inch deep!"

Who wants to yell? Well, yell then; yell doggonit! Nobody'll stop you long's you do it like a gent or a lady. Stretch your lungs.

The rodeo has been taken east, even across salt water. There inevitably remains much of the dash and go inherent in cow range roping and riding. But at Cheyenne, Pendleton, Monte Vista, Prescott, Calgary — anywhere west, in cow country, rodeo is on home soil. And there's just more *yell* about it. In western arenas it isn't merely a wild west show; not by a jugful. It's rangeland contest, to see who's the top hand.

But at night comes the time of carnival.

The last evening and high carnival. The crowd milled, yelled when and where it felt like it, jostled, laughed, rawhided each other, and got folksy. Snappy soldiers from Fort Warren, Pine Ridge Sioux all duded up in brilliant Oregon-made blankets, tourists in whatever their fancy suggested as appropriate western dress, old-timers in mail-order clothes and sporting cow-horn mustaches milled 'round and 'round, up one side of the block, down the other. A brass band of townsmen, sweltering under fire-red shirts, green kerchiefs and winter-weight angora chaps, battered a rough-shod way through verse and chorus of "Shy-ann, Shy-ann." All natives go western during rodeo, and if it takes a leg, or you have to toot a tuba and sweat under hair pants, you do your share.

"Powder Riv—er! Dust in yo're throat! Yow—eee!"

ONE crowd tramped the streets. Another was in the lobby of The Plains. Rodeo folk, those at the top. Steady going range people, mostly, making a regular business of con-

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testing from Salinas to Madison Square Garden. Ranch winter; summer, rodeo. Sober dressed, but with a flair for expensive boots, hats, shirts and breeches. Ranchers, and their kin, generally, particularly ropers and bulldoggers. A few strictly show-men had got into the bucking in late years; Hollywood cowboys, but the bucking champions seemed mostly to come from ranch country. First, roping or riding on the home place as a kid; then into the local rodeos, the short-grass shows; then into a regional show, and the big circuit. That's the way they come up from the "pumpkin shows," climbing, until some night they bow before a hand-spatting mob in Madison Square Garden; a mob that sees the exhibition of that night sees it as a show, but often does not grasp the hours of heartbreaking effort and risks that bring those champions to the top.

Some of the last night crowd was out at the Park where Frontier Nights tears loose with noisy imitation of old sin and iniquity. The saloon and gambling hall are slab faced imitations of log buildings, the beer and other drinks lacking in the potency of old Taos Lightnin' or pure-quill Terrantchula Juice. Money on the gaming tables is printed paper, worth exactly the paper it is printed on. But a lot of people get a kick out of winning or losing a few thousand phony dollars on roulette or the turn of a card. The faro cases, dice cages, wheels-of-fortune are the real thing, taken from frontier palaces of chance. But Frontier Nights uses them only in rowdy fun.

But, say now, you could find the real thing. Members of the arena brotherhood walk discreetly along a dim hall in Frontier Headquarters, shoulder into a side room through a crowd of tall-hatted men, and under dim lights they play black jack, craps, stud, or any other game you want. A horsey scent is about the room. There's hard money on table and floor. Like the arena contests, there's nothing phony about this; it's the West having some fun with its money. It's their money, isn't it? Well, —then—?

The last night of Frontier Days, and carnival filled Old Cheyenne.

AFTER the last arena event that afternoon, Andy Wallace had talked with Hi. Neither had said exactly what was going through his thoughts. But, so far as the confab went, they understood each other.

"Just as I remarked the other day, figure we can use you and Jones at the home ranch," Andy had said as though he hadn't turned this over a hundred times in his own mind. "You've given your word you'll reform. I'm believing you. There'll be less temptation at Kettle River than there is around the arena circuit," he added.

"With only two-bits in my jeans, I can't sprout much hell," said Hi wryly.

"That all the cash you got?" asked Andy. "Well, that's good."

"I'm going to see about the return of my entrance fee for not finishin' the ropin', and come I get that—"

"You leave sleeping dogs lie," said Andy sharply. "Ed Aldrich has got this trouble all smothered, and once you start asking for fees back, he'll not be able to. Next year your trouble with Bagwell will be forgot. But stir it up now and you may get barred for fighting. You can't gain anything accusing a dead man of cheating. If you want to rope again in the big time circuit you just let that fee slide. Understand?"

"I guess," said Hi rather sourly, "that under our agreement I'm listenin' to you, mister."

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It was arranged then, that when Sixty could travel, Ed Aldrich would call Steve Capps at Kettle River, Steve would come with his old car, hook the horse trailer behind, and take Hi, Sixty and Hi's roping horse all to the Wallace ranch. Andy already had taken care of the board and room bill, the stable bill for the horse, the hospital bill for Sixty.

"And whatever else there is for us to talk over and line up can wait until I get home in the fall," Andy had finished. "It may be we've got something real serious to talk between us before we git through." And that had closed that talk.

Hi took it all as gracefully as he could. He had a growing desire to see this thing to the finish; find out just why in Tophet old Andy Wallace was so hell-bent on lugging Hi Lowe out of the gutter, and what serious matter might require talk.

It just didn't figure, somehow; but before it was done, maybe it would sum up to something. Anyway he'd agreed to something and he'd stay by it.

At dusk, Hi walked the streets with a heavy five-dollar bill in his pocket; gambling fever in his blood.

Hi rubbed the five-dollar bill between his fingers as he finished recalling his talk with old Andy. The money felt hot and anxious. He had received it from a sale of the junk in what remained of his car. His money. What was left of two thousand he had put in that machine when he was riding high.

Well, rock bottom. Couldn't get a hell of a lot flatter. But with five bucks as a start, and with his luck—

Luck! Mentally he pitched that away in disgust. He'd lost his luck. Maybe there wasn't such a thing.

His way led past the *Tribune-Leader* office. The paper still was running latest developments in the Bagwell murder. Hi Lowe's car had figured prominently in the story, but not Hi Lowe. And the Wallaces had not been dragged into the published versions.

Hi turned to climb the worn plank steps to the big wide porch of Frontier Headquarters. He saw the crowd in the dim hall as he turned aside, found a chair, tilted, hooked boot heels over the iron pipe rail, and rolled a thoughtful smoke. There was straight gambling in progress back there.

TWO kids were in the next two chairs, and with the earnestness of youth they discussed luck, and what part it had in winning arena contests. They were uncurried range youngsters, in to ride wild horses bareback, risk their necks, get five dollars for each ride, and make a start in the arena.

"Wanta tell you some'in'," drawled one. "I had a little braid of old Midnight's mane in my hat band when I rode today. I stayed on, didn't I, son?"

"Sure. We've all got to have our luck with us. All of us."

"'Course. Look at Bob King, now. Wears that same old black hat every time he goes into a contest. Look at that hombre's record. Maybe the hat's not the reason—"

"Bob King's not wore that black hat fifteen year stiddy fer nothin', you bet."

"Sure he ain't. He knows. Maybe the hat's got nothin' to do with it. Maybe. But he's took no chances, he ain't. He's worn it!"

Hi Lowe grinned without mirth.

Luck in the arena; each man his luck. Hi Lowe had hocked his at a pawn shop to give Sixty Jones his chance. And a man now dead, against whom he could not reasonably register a complaint, had made him lose his luck.

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That was luck, all right.

Yep. All arena folks knew you had to have your luck with you. Hi thought of the rider who changed shirts every day; they were tailored shirts, same pattern, like one this fellow had worn in his first triumph. But he changed 'em every day he contested. Another fellow always put a sprig of fresh sagebrush in his horse's bridle before he went into the roping. Superstitions? Maybe.

But how about the one who whispered the Lord's Prayer just before he came out of the chutes riding some limb of the devil? Was that still superstition? Not so sure! Arena folk respect the other fellow's belief. Take Bob King, just for example. See him around the arena—looked rough, acted rough, joked rougher, and always at it, so those who didn't know him might think he was full of liquor. But Bob didn't know the taste of the stuff; never a drop. And he taught a Sunday school class in his home community.

Well, just take Bob King, now. He wore that same old black hat, every time, and he had a record few men equaled. Championships.

Sure, and take Hi Lowe; never'd won a contest since he'd won his first trophy, that Pendleton saddle, if he hadn't been on that hull. His luck.

Luck. Sure. Let 'em scoff. A man had to have his luck.

Hi got up suddenly, flipped his cigarette into the street, pivoted, and went shouldering through the hall to the room where men bent over cards and dice. He found a game of black jack. Stakes not so high. But a man was leaving, and Hi took the place.

"Dealer can stand on sixteen," stated the man with the card pack in hand, "and it's a four-bit limit. You'll not lose a fortune in this game."

"Aim to win," said Hi.

"That's what they all say," gibed the dealer.

HI looked him over. This dealer was a tinhorn who had come in to shake down the home boys. The committee would oust him if they knew he was in here. These games are for home folks, strictly. Professional gambling can't be allowed around rodeos. Well, if luck was with him, Hi might initiate this boy from the big city.

Cards fell. "Hit me," said Hi. He turned cards, and drawled, "Twenty-one; pay me."

"Can't do that every time," said the dealer cheerfully.

"Long as I do it often enough," suggested Hi. If he did, he'd get back his luck; the old saddle from Pendleton.

"If you feel that lucky," remarked the dealer acidly, "we'll raise the limit to five bucks."

"Okay with me," said Hi.

"Too rich for my blood," said one player, tossing in cards. The others stayed, non-committally.

Hi put a dollar on the next round. Doubled on one card to be dealt.

"Busted," said the dealer confidently. A queen had turned up.

"Like hell," said Hi, fighting excitement in his voice. "I've got twenty-one again. Pay me."

He fought the excitement getting through him. Couldn't let it make him lose his head. One of the few things he knew about his father was that he had been a reckless gambler; it was in the blood.

But Hi Lowe's luck had turned! By all that was holy, it had.

The dealer swore. He still was swearing, with less luster, more positive fervor, a half hour later when he

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quit, cold, and walked out. Hi refused the bank, gritted his teeth and passed by other games that beckoned. He had nearly a hundred dollars, and that was more than enough. He walked through street crowds in a high-headed way. He reached the shop where he had hocked the saddle.

He had money counted out on the counter by the time the shopkeeper came from the rear of the place.

"I'm takin' back my hull," said Hi, swaggering a little. "There's the ticket, and the necessary *dinero.*"

"But mister," protested the pawnbroker, "you said if you didn't come the next day—"

"Well, here I am," insisted Hi. "Better late than never! Fork over the saddle and take your cash."

"But you said if you didn't come back the next day—" began the shopkeeper again. "And, mister, a man came in here this afternoon, and he paid me twice what I loaned; should I miss a cash sale like that, after you told me if you didn't—"

"You sold it!"

The shop man raised his hands, waved them, shrugged, looked down his nose.

These cowboys. Crazy lot. A cash sale. At a hundred per cent profit! After this one had told him—

"You sold it?" Hi flung this at him. "Who to?"

"Soitenly I sold it," shrilled the little man. "How should I know who to?" He was yelling a little, through his nose, and waving his hands, in a more excited way.

Hi Lowe couldn't stand that; to see that fellow making motions, talking reedily, getting more excited. And Hi spun, walking through a little crowd that had collected in the store entrance. He wanted to break that pawnbroker's short neck; and he would if he didn't get out, right now.

He had said if he didn't come back the next day he'd never be back. But things had changed, and changed again. His luck was gone now; sure gone.

HE walked. A considerable time later he was in the park near the hospital. Maybe, now, he thought after these hours, they would let him see Sixty Jones. Help him forget the loss of the saddle, if he could just see Sixty once, and talk to him. So he turned, hurriedly, to walk to the hospital.

He came around the side of the building. Stopped. An undertaker's car stood at the side entrance. Two men were just pushing a white-swathed litter into the black hearse.

Hi felt the flaming wash of sudden fear.

Not Sixty! It couldn't be!

He hurried, got hold of the man who was climbing into the driver's seat.

"Who is it?" asked Hi. His voice stuck a little.

The jolly faced mortician turned.

"Fellow hurt in the rodeo second day of the show," he said. "Horse fell on him, or kicked him, or something. Strikes me he was pretty considerate to wait till the show was over before he give up the ghost."

The driver got into the seat, turned, saw the lost look on Hi's face.

"Friend of yours?" asked the mortician in his trade-voice.

"Pardner," said Hi huskily.

"Tough," said the man behind the wheel. "That's tough." He put in the gears and the car rolled.

Hi stood, braced, as the dark closed around him, the lights of the auto fading. The hearse swung a corner and

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was gone. He felt completely alone.

"There," said Hi, softly, "goes part of me."

He straightened fiercely. "And—get ready hell, here comes the rest!" he rasped.

He had nearly a hundred useless dollars in his pocket. He hit the first bar with a roar. Just a little drink before he made that pawnbroker think the Comanches had hit town. Just a little man-size drink.

"Whisky! Straight!" Wild, liquid madness burned Hi Lowe's throat.

No Sixty Jones, no saddle, no more luck, no more promise to Andy Wallace—and look out hell!

"Whisky," he said. "Make it straight!"

Hub Wallace bumped into him on the street after Hi had left the second bar.

"Goin' plumb to hell," declared Hi Lowe, his voice thick, his eyes beginning to get bloodshot. "Get drunk; then goin' to tear a pawnbroker apart to shee whash heesh made of! Then goin' to hell."

"Good grief," said Hub Wallace, as he watched the lurching course of Hi Lowe, "that's a call for the Kettle River rescue squad," and Hub ran for his auto.

Another saloon for Hi Lowe; and then he'd go to the pawnshop.

"Bet thash fellow bleeds ice wassher," he mumbled. "Make it si-umtiffic invessigation. Ice wassher in hish veins. I go see!"

HI entered the pawnshop in a bull-clumsy run. He was a wild sight, roughed, bleary eyed, boiling over with the injustice of his saddle sold, his luck gone—

The shop man gargled in fright, and dived for a rear door.

"No you don't," shouted Hi, and headed him off.

"Moider! Moider! Police!" A squat woman, with her hair twisted in a tight knot, suddenly popped out from somewhere, ran into the street, and screamed. "He's killing the papa; he's killing the papa! Police! Help! Moider!"

"We've sure located our man," said Hub Wallace as he and Cross-bar and Mel piled out of Hub's car. "He's inside that pawnshop sure."

"You better lay off," said Hack Nash before he got out. "That guy's goin' to have the State guard out to subdue the riot. Lay off!"

"Dam'f I will," said Hub. "He's one of our outfit."

"Well, then, it's unanimous," drawled Hack, and ran to catch up.

The last thing Hi Lowe knew, a fellow he thought was either Hack Nash, or Hub Wallace, or maybe Cross-bar Cameron, or perhaps all three of them, hit him in a business-like way with a padded club, while some fool, that looked a heap like Mel Myers, the rodeo clown, yodeled, "Go to sleep, my baybee!"

Hi Lowe went to sleep, with a woman screaming of murder, the pawnbroker yelping for the police, the distant sound of the bell on a patrol wagon clanging in increasing cadence and Hub Wallace saying, "We've got to get this Piute away before the cops get into this. The old man would cut his throat and throw him in the ditch if he found this out. And Dawn wouldn't stand for that, nohow!"

Then Hi was carried.

And after that, the straight whisky drugged him into steady, heavy unconsciousness.

Say what you please, do what you please, if an arena man's lost his luck,

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he's done; but if it's with him, he just can't lose, nohow.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE WARNING SINISTER.

HI LOWE was in a fast-rolling, smooth-running automobile when he swam out of hazy stupor. He realized he had been riding for some time. He'd had his eyes open once or twice, and it had been dark; so he'd gone back to sleep. He blinked toward the east.

Over on the right, back of naked mountains, the night had been slain and now the triumphant sun was lifting its hot, copper-bright face to peep across the mauve-swathed desert. Sharp light revealed raw colors streaked along the bodies of the shameless mountains. They suggested dawn-drowsy braves, in war paint, stretched lazily on the flats. Light cast by the sun shot through the hazeless air, and scared shadows scampered frantically to crowd close back of sagebrush, rock ledge, or yucca plant.

Day was riding swiftly on the night-cooled desert. A little band of antelope, flushed by the automobile, sprang alive, flagged their white rumps, sped away like some of those shadows suddenly unleased from coverts under sage, then turned, caught in curiosity, and watched, with their big, near-sighted eyes, as the car sped on northward.

Hi Lowe sniffed scent of desert sage; shook his head; blinked. Eyes and head not so clear. He made a noise that lacked only syllables to make it deep growl of cussing.

"You'll feel reasonably human," said the voice of Dawn Wallace, "after you've taken a drink of ice water from that vacuum bottle back of the seat. I was sure you'd need it."

She had spoken to him without turning her head. Her voice was icy, like the water he spilled into the cup cover of the water bottle. Hi downed the water eagerly, and cleared his throat.

He sat a moment trying to get a degree of cohesiveness shaken into his thinking. There was storm in the air. Just the way Dawn Wallace kept her chin up, her lips very straight, her eyes on the road, warned Hi that she was bent on making him feel low-down and no account. All right, if that was the program, let her start it.

Some miles passed and tension increased.

"Well," she said crisply, after she could stand waiting no longer, "why did you do it?"

"Why did I do what?" he countered. He knew well enough.

"What started you on this roaring drunk after you'd promised my dad you'd make a decent effort to quit such business? I can't figure what touched you off."

"Well," he said, and knew it would strike home, "if you'd seen your best friend's body bein' loaded into a dead wagon— Hell, why shouldn't I go haywire when I watched that fat undertaker loadin' Sixty Jones' remains—"

Dawn slammed on brakes. The car halted. Hoofs stamped on planks behind them. Hi saw his roping pony in his trailer hooked back of the car. Dawn turned slowly, to face him.

"Say that again," she ordered.

Hi told of seeing the body hauled away from the hospital; the conversation with the undertaker. "You may figure it's no excuse," he said a bit miserably, "but I had to find my own

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way to blot out rememberin' that I'd seen that kid's dead body on the way—"

"You didn't see Sixty Jones' dead body," said Dawn crisply. "Sixty was pretty much alive when I was at the hospital last night, and asking why you didn't come now that they were letting people see him."

"He—?" began Hi. "He was askin'—?" Then whose body—?"

"Three men were injured in the arena on the second day," said Dawn, dryly. "Two soldiers when a caisson turned over, and Sixty when Wildcat tromped him. One of the soldiers died last evening."

SHE turned away from him, put in the clutch, looked straight ahead, and drove the car up to a steady fifty miles.

After a time Hi said, "I guess I've made a beautiful fool of myself."

"That's right," said Dawn, "except there was nothing beautiful about it."

He was about to flare up and answer; but didn't, and more miles slid under the wheels.

"Maybe," he said, with exaggerated meekness, "you ought to tell me whether you're takin' me to the city dump or the cure."

"Neither," she answered. There was a pause, then she added, "I'm taking you home."

"That," he stated very soberly, "will be a new experience." He mused a moment. "A place I really could call home's somethin' I never knowed. My Utah relatives sorta handed me around; always to the one who had the most work on hand. Home. Me goin' home. That's funny, just hearin' it said."

They rolled into a little canyon, leaving the desert flats. It was a break in the first bent and shattered earth crust where the levels of western plains wrinkle into the Rockies. Dawn brought the car to a halt.

"I'm sorry," said Dawn. She stopped the motor, turned to face him, doubling one leg under her, one arm on the steering wheel, one on the back of the seat.

"You're sorry about what?" he asked flatly.

"Rubbing it in a little about going home," she replied. "I didn't mean to. I've been hoping you'd find—something like home at Kettle River." Her voice softened.

"Funny," he said slowly, "if I did." He met her gaze, searching, and she did not look away. "Maybe if a fellow had a few friends that'd trust him like Sixty does, and a place he could call home, he wouldn't run loose and wild so easy."

"They're anchors," Dawn said, half to herself. "Home, and friends, and family, can hold a man steady."

"Sixty's the only anchor I ever had," stated Hi Lowe. "I got kinda adrift when I thought I'd lost him." He dug out a half-filled cloth sack, and jarred out a proper quantity of tobacco by patting the bag with his right forefinger as he held it above a troughed cigarette paper. He'd pulled the puckering string shut with his right hand and teeth before he looked up, grinning a little, string still in his teeth, and asked, "Mind?" She shook her head, and he licked the paper, scratched a match, and lit up.

"Suppose," he said through smoke, "you let me in on how I come to be kidnaped, horse and everythin', and then I'll take the wheel to spell you."

Dawn explained how Hub had come to her room after the row in the pawnshop. It seemed best to them to get



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Hi Lowe to Kettle River at once, before he made himself and the Wallaces more trouble. Hub and Dawn merely had speeded up their father's plans for Hi to move out to the ranch. Andy Wallace and his outfit were hurrying to the Mile Hi Stampede, almost ready to break loose at Monte Vista, Colorado. The racing stock, some of the top bucking horses, the Brahmas, Buttercup, and the men, were now on the stock train headed toward Monte. Dawn was to drive the auto and meet them there. By fast driving, she could take Hi to the home ranch, get him out of the trouble zone, then drive to Monte in time to meet the men when they arrived. They'd decided on this without consulting Andy.

"YOU'RE all workin' pretty hard," drawled Hi, "tryin' to make me amount to somethin'. Can't figure why you're so hell bent to make me a worthy prodigal. You, for instance—why're you doin' this?"

"Well," said Dawn, as though she weighed reasons, "when I was a younger person than I am now, I thought you were the finest roper in the arena; one of the handsomest, in all your expensive clothes!"

He studied that. "Kids sure get funny ideas," he observed thoughtfully.

"Don't they, though?"

He looked up quickly as she said that, but she was gazing toward mountain tops above the little canyon's walls.

"I take it," he said after the brittle rattle of locusts flying had been the only sound for several minutes, "that you're kinda askin' me to try to live up to that old ideal that you—"

"I'm not asking you to live up to anything," she said a little fiercely. "Whatever you do is up to you. I'm taking you back to a ranch home, back to the range. Where all the rodeo champions get their feet on the ground and start their climb. All I'm doing is opening the way for you to get a new start. The rest is up to you. Let's get rolling."

He took the driver's seat and drove, steadily. They swung curves as the oiled road found its way over and between broken old rock that had been ocean bed when the plains had been submerged. They came to a place where the fractured earth crust formed what appeared to be a man-planned portal; the road passed the sheer-walled sandstone masses; a valley opened; Hi saw ranch buildings close ahead, and beyond, snow-streaked and sharp topped crests of the Wind River range.

"Home," said Dawn. Somehow the word carried new significance to Hi Lowe. He still was trying to just figure what was new about the word when they stopped in the ranch yard, and a tall lean man, no older than Hi, but with dark, bony features, came swinging to meet them.

"Dawn!" Surprise, welcome, a trace of eagerness as he called.

"Steve; hello, Steve!" Her reply was filled with glad greeting.

Steve Capps didn't take Dawn in his arms; he didn't kiss her. But he got grips on her hands, and held to them industriously. She allowed him to do it while there was quick-flashing questioning concerning rodeo results, her eager answers, laughter, banter. Dawn introduced Hi Lowe as soon as he stepped from the car. Then Hi stood, silently, face wooden, eyes and ears alert, but otherwise totally given over to arm-folded waiting.

After that they got the pony from the trailer, unhooked the traveling box-stall, and Mom Peters, the cook, got



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breakfast. The other ranch hands were up the Fork hay-cutting. After breakfast Hi went out on the porch and waited for Dawn and Steve Capps to come from the house. Dawn was driving on immediately. Hi waited a long time; a very long time it seemed. Then they came.

Just before she climbed into her car and headed for the cattle guard at the sandstone cliffs, Dawn waved her hand and smiled at Hi Lowe. "This is your home range now," she said, a bit lightly. "Just graze around and get to know it; salt grounds, bedding grounds, and water-holes. I'll be asking you how you like it when I get home. I'll expect you to ride over every square foot of it."

SHE was gone a moment later. Steve Capps stood, his eyes following her, until the car had disappeared beyond the gap in the guarding cliffs of the sandstone hogback. Hi waited; made a sidelong appraisal of Capps. Good man, well put together; lean and brown, and stood on his toes, balanced.

"I wouldn't," said Capps thoughtfully, after they had stood a moment, "take her orders too literally."

"This suggestion that I cover the range?" Hi faced Capps, and the foreman raised deep brown eyes that were steady and serious.

"That's the idea," he said quietly. "What she said holds except for the exception I might as well tell you now as any time." He stopped, seemed to be thinking, made a cigarette, smoked a moment, then said, "See yonder, that low-rolling ridge with that fringe of pines on it? Well, that country over beyond is the old 2 B Joined range, and some miles into it is the Blue Cliffs water. Over southwest, to the right there, that double-topped foothill with those two ridges sloping toward us is the northwest limit, and that second break down yonder, in the hogback, is the southeast limit."

"Plain enough landmarks," observed Hi as Capps stopped and puffed smoke. This was leading to something. Hi waited and wondered what.

"I hope it is plain," said Capps. "I've got to make sure it's plain enough. We'll have quite a sight of riding to do. The old man takes every last man we can properly spare from the ranch when the rodeo circuit starts, so we'll be in the saddle. If it should so happen you're following strays, and they go south beyond that ridge yonder, you just let 'em go, and some of the rest of us'll get 'em."

Again Capps stopped and let silence cover a great many things that he had failed to put in words.

"Orders?" Hi asked it quietly, after a moment.

"Orders," repeated Capps.

"I've always been bit by the curious bug; always wantin' to go over the mountain to see the other side," mused Hi soberly.

He waited. Capps met him eye to eye, appraising him, with no unfriendliness, but impersonally, with silent reserve.

"To make double sure, then," said Hi Lowe, "if I had a holiday with nowhere particular to ride—"

"You won't; not around here." Capps grinned shortly.

"But just supposin'," insisted Hi, "and I took a notion to ride in that direction, on my own time—"

"Pick the other side of some other mountain to get curious about." Steve Capps put the ashy end of his cigarette against the porch rail and methodically broke it off. "Don't go riding south of

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that ridge, or east of that two-ridged hill, or west of that break in the hog-back I pointed out. Just don't do it—unless," he added very quietly, "you want to get yourself beefed out."

Their eyes met; held. Hi nodded.

"Plain enough," said Hi. "*Bueno.*"

STEVE CAPPS learned nothing while their eyes clashed a moment; nor did Hi Lowe. No rancor, no rising animosity, just measuring each other thoughtfully, with poker faces.

"Throw your plunder into the bunk house; there's lots of room," and Capps' voice changed a little, as though he had done a solemn duty, and now could turn to cheerful, commonplace things. "We'll go on up to the lower meadow and help the boys with the alfalfa." He went striding and whistling toward the long, red-painted barn beyond the kitchen wing and men's bunk house.

Hi Lowe squinted, looked at the landmarks Capps had pointed out, scowled in perplexity, shrugged. He took up his bundle and walked, unhurriedly, to the bunk house.

There was no shred of doubt as to what Capps had meant.

If the first hour Hi Lowe had set boot soles on the Wallace ranch, Capps, the foreman, had baldly informed him, in a rangeman's way, that all other parts of the range were safe, and he was welcome to ride them; but if, for any reason whatever, Hi Lowe should ride over that ridge, into the 2 B Joined range, toward the Blue Cliffs water, Hi almost surely would be slaughtered.

Hi came out of the bunk house; and he whistled as he followed Capps' trail to the big barn. Life had a new objective.

Some day, not far distant, when he got the lay of things here, he was riding over that ridge. Dawn hadn't limited where he should ride. Men like Capps didn't tell Hiram Lowe, from south of Moab, and west of the La Sals, he couldn't do a thing, without he'd step into it some day, and make them out liars.

## CHAPTER IX.

### RANGE CHALLENGE.

HI LOWE fully expected some further sign of that deadly threat so plainly stated in the warning Steve Capps had given the hour Hi arrived at the Wallace ranch. But none came. Not in actions or talk of people at the ranch, not in any range incident, not from Capps himself.

Hours rolled peaceably, and Hi Lowe worked and waited for some confirmation of the threat. He began to question whether or not he had interpreted aright. It had come so quickly. It might, after all, be a joke to see how he would face a dare. So he decided it was strategy to wait and be entirely sure about it.

There is a deal of common sweat and muscle soreness in cattle ranching. Romantic glamour, glittering as alkali crystals rimming badlands waterholes, may encircle outer fringes of ranch life, but once past the glamour, one is likely to bog down into toil that at times is heavy, muddy drudgery.

The Wallace place was nothing more romantic than well organized cow business. Strangely, Hi Lowe was glad to get back to this routine. During recent years his riding had been confined to arenas, but in southern Utah his boyhood had been spent in the saddle, and Hi waded hungrily into work Capps laid out. Word from Cheyenne that

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Sixty Jones was on the mend gave Hi peace of mind as he labored. This also served to deepen his feeling of heavy obligation to the Wallaces, and fix his determination to pay off this debt.

The country Hi now rode was different from the garish-colored range between Moab and Paradox. Mountains and cliffs on the old range were strongly red, brilliantly ochre and contrastingly green. That painted wilderness was raw wild. It brought out raw wild in men who rode it. These Wyoming hills were grayish, rounding, impassive, but harder underneath than those brilliant sandstones of the sun-washed, sagey deserts. Like the Wyoming hills, these northern range men were not so rough looking, but they had granite hardness in them.

Particularly, Hi felt this in Steve Capps. The Wyoming man was easy enough spoken, and seemingly friendly. But there was a part of Capps back of a slow-smiling, range-stained exterior into which he would retreat, and live aloof. Hi Lowe methodically studied Wallace's foreman, but could not be sure whether this man was friendly, a neutral observer, or a downright enemy.

The ranch crew built fence across a rocky flat, rode weary trail as they bunched strays that got past a drift fence and went high-tailing toward Chauvenet Peak, and they cut, raked and stacked wild hay from meadows of Jimmy Creek, the next-north branch of Kettle River from Andy's Fork. Summer ranch routine, all of it. Labor. With sweat. And after the day's work, food that was gallant man-stuffing, a smoke or two that was incense on the evening breeze, and then sleep.

One evening Hi sat beside Capps on the plank bench just outside the screened kitchen door. It was a loung-ing spot. On the opposite side of the door was the zinc-armored shelf on which wash basins rested. A leaky faucet dribbled merribly into a sink set into one end of the sloping shelf.

This kitchen wing was one story, and stuck out like a fat arm from the west side of the story-and-a-half body of the house. One cross partition near the outer end made two small rooms; pantry, and store room. The balance of the wing was all kitchen. An eight-hole steel range backed against the partition, and a plain lumber table covered with fancy oilcloth filled half the space between the cook stove and a doorway to a dining room in the main part of the house.

THIS kitchen "L" was built so the rear wall continued flush with the back wall of the main house; but on the front side a set-back from the main house had been covered by a shed roof, and floored with pine planks. This back porch, extending the full length of the "L," was the community center and ranch-house forum. Sitting here, one looked southward, across meadow-flanked loops of Andy's Fork, toward the ridge beyond which Hi Lowe had been told he dare not ride. He sat, this still evening, beside the silent foreman and studied this outlook a bit moodily.

Inside the screen door, Casey Owens and Irby Paul, two Wallace riders, were into a hot argument as to whether a whiteface found dead that day had been killed by poison weed that was thick on upper Middle Fork, or by Old Minnie, the she-grizzly that had brought forth three cubs this year from a den on Crystal Mountain.

Mom Peters, the housekeeper, waddled between the table and the dishpan on the range. Mom was so fleshy her

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apron strings cinched her into two loppy hemispheres. She had more of a mustache than a Nez Perce, and a heart as big as God's country. Mom had hired on here when she was a husky, easy-laughing, fat, young, sod-style widow. She was dark eyed and straight haired; a pint of Arapaho blood in her veins, perhaps. Andy got her to take over housework just after his own two cubs had been left motherless.

Irby Paul, who was lean, clean-shaven and fearfully wall-eyed because he had been horse-kicked in the face when a boy, now deserted the question of who killed the bloated yearling, and began to make bare-faced love to Mom. Irby had seen half a pie in the pantry. Casey Owens, the most bow-legged runt south of the Little Missouri and proud of it, just couldn't let this go on without splashing in on his own account. Casey, who was all wire, cultivated a proud, cow-horn mustache. Mel Myers vowed it was carrying the weight of this that made Casey so tarnation bowlegged and not living on a horse. This claim made Casey spitting mad.

Steve Capps sat, elbows on knees, apparently listening to all this clatter inside. He smoked, with indolent relish. Hi Lowe felt something in the way of important talk coming.

"Got to ride toward Blue Cliffs water tomorrow," remarked Capps quietly. "Have to keep working the drift back toward Crystal Park. Not many days until high country'll be froze and we'll be wanting all the low range we can save."

"Don't feel like snow," Hi remarked, casually. He deliberately steered away from discussion of riding toward the 2 B Joined and Blue Cliffs water.

"Nope," agreed Capps. He took a slow sip of smoke. "It don't. But frost-bit high country forage doesn't pack the fattening values plains grasses do when they're frost-cured. It'll frost plenty before heavy snow comes."

INSIDE the big kitchen, Mom giggled delightedly. Irby was threatening to grab her, bodily, and carry her away on a galloping pinto. It was jolly raw-hiding. It would take a truck to carry Mom away. She knew, they all knew, that what really was going to be carried away was that extra pie.

"Just Irby and Casey and me'll ride to Blue Cliffs tomorrow," Capps stated. That came after a considerable pause.

Hi Lowe turned unhurriedly. Capps looked up, sidewise, without removing elbows from his knees. Capps grinned slightly; and Hi matched that grin. Poker grins. Both daring the other to say, or do, something revealing.

"I'd be pleased to ride with you," Hi ventured. It was a way of saying he didn't believe anything violent would happen if he rode southward.

"You've not forgot," said Capps very softly, "I told you, day you came, you shouldn't take a notion to ride that way."

"I don't forget easy." Hi tossed that in casually.

"I had you sized up as having a good memory," mused Capps. He said it as though he figured Hi could take a wise word wisely. "I wouldn't take you with me into that country," continued Capps slowly. "If you go, ever, it's at your own risk. My advice still is, that if you're thinking there's something over yonder you ought to see—there isn't. Everything I said the first day still stands."

All said quietly. The first mention, since the first day. Hi knew now there was no joke in this. If this had been a

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sandy there would have been more bluster about it.

A bull bat began nose-diving after insects. The ghostly wind in his wings boomed softly over the shallow valley. Irby and Casey had captured the pie and had turned easily from ardent love-making to praise of Mom's cookery.

Hi Lowe turned from Capps, looked southward to the pines that were silhouetted like fuzzy warriors in single file along that ridge. Didn't seem as though anyone riding over that ridge could be facing a threat of death. Peaceful, that ridge—and a challenge.

"I've never seen a range," said Hi, almost to himself, "that was so generally dangerous I was scared out from riding it."

"This range," Capps drawled, "isn't generally dangerous. But it's something like poison to you."

No loud threat. Just cold, calm statement.

"Figured," said Capps continuing, "I'd take Irby and Casey with me and we'll chouse the she-stuff from Blue Cliffs toward Crystal Park. You take staples and a wire stretcher and ride north, over on Jimmy Creek, and nail up that place in the lower drift fence. Wire's almost dragging the ground there." Capps finished his quiet-spoken orders, stood up, stretched, fists above head, lazy-tense, then dropped his arms in relaxation. Stood, loosely. "Others 'll not think anything particular of you not riding with us over there tomorrow if you're busy fixing fence." It was a half warning to Hi that this business lay wholly between him and Steve Capps.

HI got up, leaned against a porch post, looked at the piney ridge.

"By the Lord," he said slowly, "I've never had any man, in all my life, tell me I couldn't ride where I wanted to on my home range. Dawn Wallace didn't say to stay out of—"

"She didn't!" cut in Capps levelly. "I did the telling. I'm saying again, Lowe, don't ride south—if you value your life."

They faced each other in quick tenseness. It passed.

"Irby, Casey and me'll ride Blue Cliffs way tomorrow; you mend fence on Jimmy Creek. *Bueno?*" Capps smiled slightly.

"I'll fix the fence," replied Hi Lowe as matter-of-factly.

He stood for minutes after Capps had gone. Looking toward that ridge. This thing had simmered and strung along far enough. Something that rated life-and-death importance, something he couldn't figure, lay beyond that piney ridge toward Blue Cliffs water. Since it rated that way when Hiram Lowe was concerned, there was only one thing to do. Ride over and see—what he might see.

He saw Capps and the two men riding south next morning as he headed north. He fixed fence, working swiftly. Then, keeping eastward from the hogback, so it would be between him and the ranch, he rode southward, using his fence tools where needed, to drop wires so he could follow a more direct route. He was unarmed. But so was Capps as he had ridden that morning.

Hi Lowe turned every angle over in his mind. No talk of neighbor trouble; no rustlers, though they were doing more damage generally in the West than even in the old days of open range. Just no reason he could find as he sifted everything in his mind, why any unarmed, peaceable man shouldn't ride south into the Blue Cliffs area; and with Capps probably whanging the

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rumps of balky cows as they were pushed up into Crystal Park, miles to the west, this looked like good time to scout this unknown range.

The good horse under him short-stepped down a side gulch into the abrupt break through the hogback that Capps had pointed out as the northeast corner of the forbidden country. The canyon through the hogback was like the one two miles northward, at the ranch. A narrow, straight-walled corridor, with a stream in it, a wagon road on the little bench between stream and stratified cliffs.

The cliffs ended as vertically as a door casement, and almost before he could rein in, Hi's horse was beyond the west escarpment of the ridge, out in the edge of open grass land, that rolled slowly southward. Almost as he swept the outlook, Hi saw someone over to the right, riding down from the piney ridge.

It was Steve Capps. And even across the little distance between them, Hi saw Capps had a rifle in a saddle boot, and a heavy belt gun strapped on.

Hi dismounted; waited. He was in no position to argue against guns. Capps came on. Hi was rolling a cigarette as Capps dismounted. Hi offered the tobacco sack and papers. It was a sign of armistice. Capps took them, silently, shook out tobacco, handed back the sack.

"Memory's not so good," drawled Capps. His eyes were like brown agate.

"Memory's perfect," said Hi, blowing smoke. "But maybe you've forgot I said last night that no man ever told me where I could or couldn't ride on my home range."

"I remembered," said Capps, blowing out the match he held and breaking the stem. "That's why I sent the other two on and came back to ride herd on you. I figured you might try this fool thing today."

"I've a mind," said Hi quite soberly, "to get damn personal about this, and see how long it'll take me to break you in two or three pieces."

"I'm awful close to the same way of thinking myself," drawled Capps. "Sensible thing, I guess, would be to hog-tie you, tote you back to the ranch, and throw you into the granary. Then wire the old man that if he wants you kept out of the Blue Cliffs section so damn bad, he better come home and ride herd on you himself so I'd have a chance to do some common ranching." Acid edge crept into Capps' voice. Hi guessed the foreman had been watching his every move from the day he had arrived. Whatever lay toward the Blue Cliffs water took on sudden and increasing importance.

"I take it," suggested Hi, "it's not just a whim of yours, to keep me out of the Blue Cliffs and 2 B Joined country?"

CAPPS puffed gustily, and shook his head. "Far as I'm personally concerned," he stated, and there was more resentment in his voice, "you could ride corns on you and do it all on this south range—and take the consequences if there were any. I'm to keep you out of here until Andy gives the word."

Sharp and clear came an explanation of why Andrew Wallace had put Hi Lowe under obligations; why he had dragged Hi out of the gutter with such determination—and yet hated him so fiercely.

There was some dangerous, lawless job to be done on this southern range. Neither the Wallaces nor their men dared to do it. Andy had found his man. He had him under heavy obliga-

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tion. When the time came, Hi would know what job he must do to square accounts, and until that time, Andy wanted him to stay out of that section for some good reason.

Hi shrugged a little. Then went cold. He'd forgotten. When an arena man loses his luck he's in for trouble. Hi Lowe had lost his saddle, his big luck. That was bad, very bad. He scowled at far hills, and was disturbed.

"I'm glad," said Hi after a time, "there's nothing really personal between you and me in this."

"Yeah," said Capps, "it would have gone against the grain to lay sights on you." His eyes glittered a little.

"I don't think you'd have really done it," said Hi Lowe speculatively.

"Ride on, where you was going, and find out." Capps was laughing a little, not outwardly, but deep-like.

"If old Andy doesn't want me to go over into that country—" began Hi Lowe. He met Steve Capps' eyes, and it was the foreman's that wavered this time, and sought the pine ridge tops. "As I said," mused Hi, "since Andy seems to have such a red-hot reason for me not goin' into that range—"

"He sure as hell must have."

"What's the reason, Capps?"

"I could guess a bushel of guesses, and maybe every other one near the truth. But damned if I *know*, Lowe." The foreman turned an open, honest eye-meeting gaze on Hi. He was telling the truth.

"Well," said Hi, "guess I'll have to wait until the old man comes home and thrash it out first hand. Must say I don't blame Andy for puttin' enough trust in you to have you run the ranch while he's gone." Approval slipped into Hi Lowe's voice. "You're hell on carrying out his orders."

"Yeah, I guess," agreed Capps, and smiled a little. "And I figure a man would be a fool to ride in here like you have after what I told you. Or he'd do it simply because he had guts." A pause, then, "I don't rate you a fool, Lowe. Been watching you, and you're no fool."

They both laughed shortly. They had told each other, in left-handed words, that each had found something in the other to admire. With personal animus taken from this crisis, there immediately was more understanding between them.

"Suppose," suggested Hi, "we ride back to the ranch."

"Suppose we do," agreed Capps.

From the top of the ridge they looked ahead to the ranch buildings, the home meadows, the grasslands between the hogback and the foothills; a north and south valley trough, wide, shallow, laid long between plains and granite mountains. Then Hi twisted in the saddle, and looked southward, over the 2 B Joined and Blue Cliffs country.

"I'll sure thrash this out with the old man," he said to Capps. "Won't try ridin' that-a-way again until after Andy gets back. But then I may be ridin' this south range spite of hell."

"Which," Steve Capps said, voicing thoughts he had better kept hidden, "will be too damned soon if half my guesses are right."

Hi swung around. Capps' brown eyes, suddenly cold, met his defiantly. If Capps knew anything, even suspected anything, that might lie back of Andy Wallace's orders to keep Hi Lowe from that range, Capps would not tell. Hi looked at him and knew he wouldn't tell. So they rode. Wordlessly. But Hi realized there was trouble ahead.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK

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Capizzi thrust his hand into his pocket significantly

# The Great Little Handicapper

By C. C. RICE

***It isn't often that a man's life depends on a horse race—and Long Shot Louie was in desperate need of a good tip***

LOUIS GRIMES, better known as Long Shot Louie among his East Side associates, disliked spring, and for a peculiar reason. Not, for instance, because grippe came, or hay fever, or income tax. Louie considered these afflictions trivial. He never caught cold, had no notion of what hay fever was, and had never in his life been required to make out an income tax.

Louie disliked spring for quite a dif-



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ferent and personal reason: because the Widow Grimes came to town.

The Widow Grimes, let's understand right here and now, was no little old lady tottering about in old lace and bombazine. Not at all—the Widow Grimes was Louie's sister-in-law, a very young and efficient person with definite ideas about everything in the world, and a particularly definite one about horses.

In Louie's own words, "That dame is a regular tigercat on wheels! It's a wonder poor Brother Harry lasted as long as he did!"

What Louie hated worst about her annual visits to the city was that she always insisted on seeing him for lunch. And before he could get a spoonful of soup down, she would begin a pressing appeal for a little help in paying off the mortgage, or doctor bills, or anything else that needed paying off.

Now Louie was by no means a hard-hearted person. He would gladly have helped his struggling sister-in-law as best he could. But she seemed possessed to meet up with him when he was flat broke—as all turf-lovers are apt to be in the spring. He would try to explain, but she always turned a cold, deaf ear.

"Horses!" she would hiss. "Horses! That's where your money goes, Louis Grimes! If you'd like my opinion, I think a person who fritters away his money on mangey race-horses when he has a widowed sister-in-law working her arms off to make both ends meet—well, I think he's positively indecent, that's what I think!" In other words, Louie was a very low person indeed, and would never go to heaven at all.

What was worse, he had no comeback for her, and she wouldn't have listened to it if he had. So he suffered in silence every spring.

This particular spring day Louie was doubly uncomfortable. He had recently received a letter from the Widow Grimes telling him that he could expect her at noon today. That was bad enough. But to make things much worse, he was in a jam.

For two weeks he had owed six hundred dollars to Fortnight Capizzi, the result of an ill-advised black jack game. Fortnight had given him until today to pay up, and today Louie had a grand total of thirty dollars in his trousers. Which meant that very likely he would be debt-free within a few hours. In short, Fortnight Capizzi had gained his nickname because of his very kindly habit of cancelling debts promptly after two weeks. That is to say, Fortnight was one of the handiest parties with a Roscoe in that part of town.

SO it can be understood that Louie was not in the highest spirits this particular spring day as he went through the motions of a billiard game at his club.

"Wake up, Long Shot," prompted Truck Walsh, "it's your turn."

"Yeah," put in Barney Sobel, "quit dreamin', for Pete's sake!"

"Uh," muttered Louie, and took his shot. He missed badly. His mind was not on the game. He was pondering. How was he going to give Fortnight the six yards? It seemed hopeless. There was only one possible chance he could think of. There were two horses running at Pimlico today that he knew a good deal about. Both were *bound* to win—which, in the language of turf-lovers, means they had a fifty-fifty chance.

Hmm, he thought, if he could run

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that thirty bucks up to six hundred at Tad's handbooking office, his troubles would be over. And it was a good chance, too, for both those horses would pay off at good odds. Well, it looked like the only way out.

The pay telephone rang. A fellow club member answered it and hollered, "Hey, Long Shot, somebody wants you. It's a dame."

"A dame!" Louie snorted incredulously. And then he remembered about the Widow Grimes. Groaning, he ambled to the phone, dragging his cue after him.

"Hello," he said thickly, through his cigar.

"Hello, Louis. This is Mabel Grimes."

"Oh!" said Louie. "How are you, Mabel?"

"I'm not feeling at all well, as a matter of fact," she told him. "The reason I came down is because I have an appointment with a specialist. You see, I am going to have to have a serious operation. Though where I'm to get the money for it *I* don't know."

Louie paused. "Why—why, I'm sorry, Mabel."

"Oh, don't worry, I'm not going to ask your help financially. Though heaven knows I need it! What I'm going to ask is that you take care of little Helen Jane this afternoon. My appointment is for three o'clock, and there's simply nothing I can do with her."

Louie was taken aback. He vaguely remembered that there was a child called Helen Jane. He had never seen her, but by quick calculation he figured she must be about six now. In all his forty years, Louie had probably spoken no more than a dozen words with a six-year-old little girl. He was downright frightened and inconvenienced at the prospect of having such a creature on his hands.

"Well — I — uh — I tellya," he coughed nervously.

"No excuses now, Louis!" she snapped. "Here's one thing you *can* do to help me out. I'll be waiting in the Astor lobby at two-thirty sharp."

"All right, all right," he muttered. "I'll be there."

He returned peevishly to his game, missed another shot miserably, and gave up in disgust.

He went out to catch a sandwich lunch before going uptown. Now what, he thought, was he going to do with a six-year-old child all afternoon? And what was going to happen to his fancy bets? He munched on his sandwich nervously. Certainly he couldn't take a little girl into Tad's handbooking office. Or at least, if he did, Mabel might find out and kill him, thereby saving Fortnight Capizzi the trouble! Oh, hell, he didn't know! All he knew was that it was two-fifteen already and he'd better get moving to the Astor.

He showed up there promptly at two-thirty. There they were, right under the clock.

"Louis," said the Widow Grimes hurriedly, "I'm in an awful rush. I'll meet you here at five-thirty sharp. Take Helen Jane to the Aquarium. It might interest you, too. You could see what some of the other poor fish look like!"

Louie scowled after her as she strode away.

"How do you do, Uncle Louis?" piped a small voice from below.

LOUIE looked down and saw an immaculately dressed child with golden ringlets, large blue eyes, and a bright smile. He removed his cigar for a second, surprised at the

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pleasant sensation the pretty young face gave him.

"Uh—you can call me Louie," he muttered condescendingly.

"How do you do, Uncle Louie?" she corrected. "Do we really have to go to the aquarium?"

"What's the matter? Don't you want to go there?"

"Well, to tell the truth, Uncle Louie, I am fed up with the aquarium. You see," she explained proudly, "I have been to New York before, and I've already seen it."

Louie looked down at her curiously. He'd never imagined that a child Helen Jane's age would speak so intelligently. His sister-in-law must have taken a great deal of pains with her education.

"Then what would you like to do?" he asked.

"Well, Uncle Louie, I simply adore just poking about, as Mamma says."

"Okay, kiddo," he chuckled, "let's go."

Out they went, hand in hand, and wandered slowly down Broadway, Helen Jane babbling pleasantly. She had amusing remarks to make about everything she saw. The tall, gold-braided movie barkers looked like the fish footman in *Alice in Wonderland*. The spotlessly white orange juice stands reminded her of the hospital when she had her tonsils out. In fact, she could think of a comparison for everything that caught her sight.

If Louie's mind had not been wandering, he might have found her chatter pleasant enough. But post-time was already half an hour past, and those sweet tips were evidently destined to go to waste. Forgotten Man in the sixth, a fifteen-to-one shot at least. Madame Glue in the seventh, the best "sleeper" in weeks.

If only he could cash in on them and run that thirty bucks up to the necessary six C's. Six C's! Oh, Gawd—Fortnight Capizzi! If he wasn't in the middle of four wooden sides by tomorrow, it wouldn't be Fortnight Capizzi's fault!

He became so preoccupied that he scarcely bothered to answer Helen Jane's numerous questions. But Helen Jane was not at all offended. She just clasped his fingers tightly and trotted along, swinging her little hand bag merrily.

After they had covered a good many blocks, Louie automatically turned east. They crossed several avenues and finally came to a halt before a dirty, uninviting doorway.

An oily looking person loitering there greeted Louie.

"Hello, Long Shot. Thought maybe you'd show up at Tad's today."

Louie looked startled. "Uh—hello, Fortnight," he stammered. "Just thought I'd go up to see how the crocodiles were running."

"Perhaps you got a little dough for me?" said Fortnight, out of the corner of his mouth. "Y'know today's the day, Long Shot." He thrust his hand into his pocket significantly.

Small beads of perspiration started on Louie's forehead. He leaned close to Fortnight and whispered.

"Listen, Fortnight, I got exactly thirty bucks on me. Give me a chance to string it out to the six C's, will you? I can do it—I got two horses that can't lose."

Fortnight narrowed his eyes. "And if not—?"

LOUIE shrugged his shoulders eloquently.

"Okay, Long Shot. Do your worst. And don't forget, I'm waitin' outside here for you."

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"Thanks, Fortnight." Louie turned to Helen Jane. "Listen, kiddo, we've got to step in here for a few minutes."

"Yes, Uncle Louie," she chirped.

They went inside and climbed a flight of dingy steps. At the top a man looked out at them through a slot in the door.

"Okay, Long Shot," he said, and opened up.

Helen Jane saw a strange sight before her. A large, smoke-filled room crowded with a great many men. At the end of the room were several blackboards, all covered with queer designs and figures. In front of the blackboards were ranged tables and benches, almost like a schoolroom. In one corner was a partitioned section with a couple of window-holes. One window was labeled BETTING, the other PAY-OFF.

She couldn't guess what the room meant, but it looked most interesting. Furthermore, the men seemed very nice. They all stopped their buzzing conversation as she entered with Louie, and turned to inspect her. Some lifted their eyebrows surprisingly; others chuckled and waved at her.

She giggled as she followed Louie to one of the front benches.

Louie greeted a couple of young men seated there.

"Hello, Truck—hello, Barney."

Truck and Barney looked up from their racing-form.

"So you got here after all," said Truck. "Thought you were going to be tied up."

"Thought I was for a while," said Louie, his voice still quavering a little.

Then Truck and Barney discovered he was not alone. They stared at Helen Jane.

"Who's the little dame?" Truck asked.

"Oh, she's just my niece," said Louie, hoisting her up on the bench beside him.

"Gee, it's sort of a funny place to bring a kid."

"What's going to hurt her?" Louie wanted to know.

"Oh, nothing, I guess. Who do you like in the fourth?"

"Haven't got anything for that. Let's see the paper."

Truck handed it to him. Louie ran his finger down the list of entries. He felt a tug at his sleeve.

"Uncle Louie, what are you doing?"

"Huh? Oh, I'm just looking over the horses."

"Horses?" She brightened. "Oh, I simply adore horses! Specially ponies! I want a pony more than anything else in the world. Mamma says a pony is too extravagant, but I tell her that she wants an operation, and an operation is just as extravagant as a pony. But Mamma says we can't afford either one."

"Hmm," grunted Louie, not unpleasantly, as Helen Jane stopped for breath. Truck and Barney chuckled.

"Uncle Louie," she chattered on, "may I look over the horses, too? I'd like to find a name for my pony."

"Sure," said Louie, and moved the paper over before her.

SLOWLY she pronounced the names of the entries for the fourth race.

Helen Jane was no soft critic. It took some time before she found a horse that exactly suited her.

"Foxie Sis!" she cried. "That will be my pony's name, because I think that is a cute name for a pony."

"Foxie Sis," muttered Louie. "That may be a hunch. I'll stick a finnif on her." He sounded desperate.

"A deuce here," said Truck.

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"Same here," added Barney. "She'll pay ten-to-one."

"What does ten-to-one mean, Uncle Louie?"

"It means that if I bet five dollars on Foxie Sis and she wins, I'll get paid back ten times as much as I bet."

"Heavens!" she gasped. "That's a lot, isn't it?"

"Well, it's fifty dollars."

"Fifty dollars!" she murmured thoughtfully. "Listen, Uncle Louie, I have some money saved up for my pony. It's quite a lot—fifty-seven cents. I've got it right here in my bag. So, Uncle Louie, if I bet it on Foxie Sis, would I get ten times that much?"

Now, if Louie hadn't been so steeped in turf-lore as he was, he might have been properly horrified at the thought of an innocent six-year-old child plunging on the races. But the fact was, he didn't see a thing wrong with the notion.

On the contrary, he was rather pleased at Helen Jane's spirit.

"Sure you would," he told her, "provided she won."

Truck and Barney gaped at him in amazement.

"You're not really going to let the kid bet her money!" protested Truck.

"Why not? Foxie Sis is as good a bet as any."

"But—"

Helen Jane interrupted. "Uncle Louie, what would happen if Foxie Sis lost?"

"Then you wouldn't get anything."

"Not even my fifty-seven cents?"

"Not a sou."

It didn't take Helen Jane a second to detect the weakness in such an arrangement. "Oh," said she, "then I wouldn't dare to risk my fifty-seven cents. I'll just sit and watch you play, Uncle Louie."

"Atta girl!" Truck and Barney commended.

The amplifier suddenly began rasping: "They're at the post at Pimlico. Get your bets in, boys."

The electric sign AT POST lighted up, and there was a slight scramble for the betting window. Louie left them to write out the tickets.

Presently he returned with the white stubs.

"Now," he said to Helen Jane, "we'll see what kind of a selector you are."

"Oh, Foxie Sis will win all right," she assured him confidently.

"All betting closed!" announced the amplifier. Then: "First call coming."

THERE was a faint ticking of the tape, and the voice continued: Quarter call: Number eight, Bank Shot, leading by two lengths. Number three, Lauretta Nash, second. Number four, Foxie Sis, running third."

"Foxie Sis!" whispered Helen Jane, interestedly. "That's my horse."

"Half call: Number eight, Bank Shot, still leading. Number four, Foxie Sis, second. Number six, Hogan's Folly, running third."

The three men exchanged amused glances.

"Looks as though she's right in there," chuckled Louie, and patted Helen Jane's hand fondly.

"Stretch call: Bank Shot leading by a neck. Foxie Sis second. Number two, Trillium, running third."

Louie became excited. "Come on, you dog!" he rasped through his cigar.

"Come on, Foxie Sis!" called Helen Jane, enthusiastic, yet calm.

"Finish," said the amplifier. "Number four, Foxie Sis, wins by a nose—"

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Louie roared and clapped Truck and Barney on the shoulders.

"We win, don't we, Uncle Louie?" cried Helen Jane, well pleased.

"You bet we do, kiddo, and here's a sawbuck for the tip." He tossed a crisp bill into her lap.

"Is it all for me, Uncle Louie?"

"Sure it is. You earned it."

"Here's some more for you, Helen Jane," said Truck, and dropped her another bill.

"Three cheers for Helen Jane!" laughed Barney as he followed suit.

They delivered the cheers with a will. A dozen curious bettors crowded around and wanted to know what it was all about.

"Meet Helen Jane!" shouted Louie, swinging her up on his shoulders. "The little queen of handicappers!"

"And that's no lie!" agreed Truck. "She just picked a ten-to-one shot. Now she's going to pick something just as good."

"Sure she is!" said Louie, momentarily forgetting his troubles. "Pick a real good one for the gentlemen, Helen Jane."

He handed up the paper. As she balanced herself on Louie's shoulder, she giggled and read over the names in the fifth race. A dozen expectant faces watched her intently.

"If Ida," she began slowly. "No, not that. Ixnay—no, that doesn't make sense. Most Always—no. Sir Anthony—yes! That's what I'll name my pony, because I think it's a very dignified name."

A murmur of "Sir Anthony" passed among her disciples, and they moved off to the betting window. Louie followed, his pride in Helen Jane overshadowing his qualms about the sinister figure that waited outside.

Soon the amplifier was reporting again. The backers of Sir Anthony gathered down in front near Helen Jane and sat back to listen with all their ears.

THE announcer droned the first two calls without a mention of Sir Anthony. There was a strained silence in the Helen Jane camp. Several eyed their stubs with distinct misgivings.

And then: "Stretch call: Number two, Most Always, leading by a length. Number five, Sir Anthony—"

The valiant animal had suddenly dropped into second place! The cheering that arose in Tad's office would have done his equine heart good if he could have heard it.

Louie himself clenched his teeth hard on his cigar and howled like a schoolboy at a football game.

Maybe the din of encouragement did reach Sir Anthony by some manner of mental telepathy. Something spurred him on at any rate, for in a few seconds—

"Finish: Number five, Sir Anthony wins—"

A dozen supposedly civilized men executed a crude Indian war dance with all the appropriate whoops and hollers. They finished up with three more hearty cheers for Helen Jane.

Helen Jane herself was highly gratified by the enthusiastic attentions of so many nice, genial men. But she was just a little vague as to the reason for all the fuss. Picking out horses seemed such a simple feat that any one of them might have done it for himself. However, being a sensible child, she decided not to express her opinion. If they wanted to rave, let them. She was having a good time.

"Come on, you mugs!" Louis was shouting. "Ante up to Helen Jane!

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Feed the kitty!" He himself dropped a ten dollar bill in her lap. The others were perfectly willing to follow his example, for there is no one on this green earth so instilled with generosity as a person who has just won money on a horse.

Good-naturedly they filed past Helen Jane, dropping twos, fives, even tens into the folds of her spotless little skirt.

One gentleman donated a dollar bill.

"How much did *you* win?" demanded Louie suspiciously.

"Uh—well, about fifteen bucks," he admitted sheepishly.

"Make it a couple more bucks, brother," barked Louie. "Don't be a piker."

Helen Jane's eyes grew rounder at each new bill, but she remained collected, thanked them all in a ladylike manner, and stuffed the money into her hand bag. She felt it appraisingly, and gave a short gasp of awe.

"Uncle Louie," she whispered, "do you think I have enough for a pony yet?"

"Well, perhaps not right now, but if you keep up the good work you will have damned soon."

"Oh, wouldn't that be simply wonderful! How much would I have to have?"

"Hmm. Well, I couldn't just say. I know you can claim a pretty good horse for five hundred. Probably get a pony for less. Perhaps two-fifty."

"That's an awful lot, though. Do you really think I could get that much, Uncle Louie?"

"Why not? You're certainly going to have plenty of customers."

SHE looked up and found that she was the center of a large circle of men. News of Helen Jane's startling skill had traveled fast, and where a few minutes ago there had been only a dozen followers, there were close to fifty now. They eyed her reverently. She had but to speak, and they would act.

"Pick a horse for them, Helen Jane," Louie prompted, handing her the form and indicating the proper race.

"Yeah, come on, Helen Jane!" she was urged from every side. "Make it a hot one!"

It took longer than usual this time. She felt she must be very cautious, considering that there were so many depending on her judgment. Horse after horse was discarded before she could decide.

"Guiding Light!" she finally announced, triumphantly. "I think I will name my pony that, because we sing about it in Sunday School."

The crowd whistled in amazement. Guiding Light was a twelve-to-one shot, they protested. He was running above his class. The distance was too long for him.

But Guiding Light she insisted, so there was nothing to do but obey. Hesitantly they moved off to the betting window. Louie followed suit, so concerned with Helen Jane's choices that he entirely forgot the fancy tips that had brought him there in the first place.

If the crowd had doubted Helen Jane's discretion for a moment, their worries were over quickly. For when the amplifier began rasping again, they learned that Guiding Light had grabbed the lead from the very first post, and held it the whole distance, finishing handily by two lengths.

The roaring in Tad's office during that race was so deafening that the announcer could barely make himself heard. And at the finish the thunder-

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clap of cheers was so terrific that the management demanded quiet. "Or did they want the cops to come busting in?"

The race was hardly over before Louie, very nearly swallowing his cigar in excitement, was organizing the bettors for the grand march past Helen Jane. Truck and Barney helped round up the jubilant mob into some semblance of order. Small and large amounts dropped into Helen Jane's little white skirt like leaves from a tree. Dollar notes galore. Twos, fives, tens, and even a twenty. Her hand bag was stuffed so full when she snapped it shut that several green corners poked out between the clips as though gasping for air.

Helen Jane did not know whether to be overjoyed or frightened at her sudden wealth. In any case, she had little time to speculate, for the crowd was already pressing her for a selection in the seventh, and final race. The hall was now divided into two religions—believers and disbelievers in the divine inspiration of Helen Jane. The disbelievers were in the minority, for it took a cynical heart indeed to scoff at her record so far.

"Let's have a real hot one for the last race, kiddo," Louie urged her, beaming with pride.

"Make it Helen Jane's One Best Bet for Today," laughed Truck.

SHE took the paper and tried her best to be calm. So many eager men shouting at her made her nervous. It was lucky that the last race had only a half a dozen entries, most of them bearing names that meant nothing to her. Otherwise she would have had a hard time to decide. Aborigine, Moorish Amulet, Pompestian she threw out right away. She narrowed it down to a choice between Sulky Lad and Quickstep. And there she was at a deadlock.

Her customers hung on her words nervously. Finally she drew a long breath.

"Quickstep!" she announced. "I think that is the best name for a pony. Because Sulky Lad sounds mean, don't you think so, Uncle Louie?"

Louie thought so, and so did the crowd. There was a wholesale sigh of relief. For the simple reason that Quickstep was the even-money favorite. The other, Sulky Lad, was twenty-to-one.

"There's a real tip!" said Louie. "Quickstep couldn't lose this race if they sawed him in halves at the post!"

In a body they moved away toward the betting window, intent on playing Helen Jane's One Best Bet for Today.

Suddenly there was a sharp rapping on the outside door. Customers and management pricked up their ears and held their breath. Wood against wood—that was the sound of a night-stick. Outside there was a scuffle of feet and sounds of a bitter argument. The doorman opened his slot and peered. He looked back at the customers with a puzzled expression and then opened the door a crack.

"No, lady," he croaked. "Go away, now. You can't come in here."

An umbrella was thrust into the opening.

"Step aside!" commanded a determined female voice. "Step aside or I'll scream!"

"Now listen, lady—"

"Listen, rubbish!" She squirmed in through the door and elbowed the astonished tender aside. All eyes were on her. Was she a policewoman? Everyone gnawed his lips nervously. Louie stared with wide open jaws.

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"Mabel!" he gasped. His cigar dropped to the floor.

She withered him with one glance.

"Well!" she said lowly, between her teeth. "Well! So you are here after all. They told me when I phoned your club, and I couldn't believe it!"

"I—I just dropped in for a second!" Louie stammered miserably.

"Louis Grimes!" she hissed. "I don't know why I don't have you thrown in jail!"

There was a moment of tense, uncomfortable silence, broken suddenly by a piping little voice.

"Look, Mamma. See all the money I have for my pony!"

Helen Jane held up her bag proudly for Mabel to inspect. Mabel's expression changed slowly from anger to astonishment. Such a profusion of green notes was enough to give anyone a turn.

"Where did you get that?" she demanded suspiciously.

"She won it on the horses," Louie explained, a hopeful note in his voice.

"I don't believe it, Louis!" she snapped. "No one ever won money that way."

"She did win it," he insisted.

"You mean to tell me," said Mabel, "that it's possible to pick out horses that will actually *win?*"

"Of course!" Louie assured her, warming to the subject. "And Helen Jane just picked a horse for the next race that couldn't lose with King Kong in the saddle."

"He's an awfully nice horse, Mamma," chirped Helen Jane. "His name is Quickstep."

MABEL paid little attention to her daughter. She was counting the money with great care. "Two hundred and five dollars!" she murmured, and then narrowed her eyes in shrewd contemplation.

"Louis, you are positive that this horse will win?"

"Nothing else he can do, no kidding."

Her jaw set in determination and she thrust the bundle of bills at him.

"Here, bet this on the horse! If Helen Jane is going to have her pony, I'm going to have my operation!"

Louie's eyes bulged and his jaw hung loose. For a moment he was the picture of a stupefied idiot. Then the amplifier broke out again and brought him to.

"All bets in, boys! They're at the post in the seventh."

"Good for you, Mabel!" Louie roared joyously, and joined the plunge for the betting window.

Standing in line he took stock of his own finance. Just about three hundred bucks. He knew he could stall Fortnight Capizzi for a while with that amount. But why not get the whole six hundred? Quickstep would pay off even, and by betting his whole roll he could collect the exact six C's. It was risky, but— Suddenly he clenched his teeth hard. If the Widow Grimes could go the whole roll, he certainly could! Nobody was going to say that Long Shot Louie was a piker!

Hastily he scribbled out two tickets on Quickstep; one for two hundred and five dollars, and one for three hundred.

"Quiet, everybody!" hollered the announcer. "Quarter call: Quickstep leading by two lengths, Aborigine second, Sulky Lad third."

Louie was crouching beside Helen Jane, holding her hand tight. "It's in the bag, kiddo," he whispered hoarsely.

"Half call: Quickstep still leading,

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by one length; Sulky Lad second, Aborigine third."

Louie squeezed her hand harder, and Helen Jane giggled breathlessly. The crowd was roaring its lungs out now. Even Mabel was sitting tensely, winking her eyes in excitement.

"Stretch call: Quickstep still on top by half a length!" The announcer himself was becoming excited. "Sulky Lad second, Aborigine third!"

The whole room was on its feet, stamping and shouting like maniacs. Louie's heart was beating like a trip hammer. Helen Jane pressed close to him, laughing merrily.

"Pipe down, you guys!" howled the announcer frantically. "Shut up, I tell ya. The finish: Sulky Lad wins by a nose!"

A sudden, horrible silence filled the room. Smiles vanished from one hundred faces in a split second. Two hundred eyes stared, petrified. Two hundred knees went limp, and the whole crowd collapsed into their seats.

LOUIE thought his heart had fallen into his stomach. His throat went dry and his blood cold. He glanced at the Widow Grimes and cringed under her destroying gaze. He looked away quickly, only to see something even more frightening. Fortnight Capizzi was approaching him, a cold glare on his oily features.

"Well, Long Shot," he grunted, poking something steely into the small of Louie's back, "are you payin' off, or are you takin' a little walk with me?"

Louie knew how it felt to face the gallows now. There was not an ounce of muscle working in his whole body. The room started revolving about him sickeningly. Those horrible words were still ringing in his ears: "Sulky Lad wins by a nose . . ."

Suddenly, as from a great distance, he heard the announcer bawl again.

"Just a minute, everyone! There was a foul claimed in that race. Sulky Lad bore in on Quickstep in the stretch and they've disqualified him. Quickstep is the official winner!"

Hell broke loose in Tad's office. A merry kind of hell. The air was thick with thunderous cheering. Hats were hurled every which way. The customers howled, danced, broke chairs, tore papers, tore their own lungs.

Louie rubbed his eyes dazedly. The strength surged back into him. He turned on Fortnight Capizzi and thrust the ticket in his face.

"Here!" he roared jubilantly. "This is worth six C's at the window. Take it and go to hell, you mug!"

Then he grabbed up Helen Jane, set her on his shoulders and bellowed with joy until the very walls rattled.

Helen Jane was laughing delightedly as she perched on Louie's shoulder and heard the crazy mob cheering her at the top of their lungs. Even Mabel called her name proudly.

"I knew he'd win, Uncle Louie!" Helen Jane shouted in his ear. "I knew that Sulky Lad was mean!"

"Sure you did, kiddo!" he shouted back. "Who'd know any better than the greatest little handicapper in captivity!"

Mabel approached him a little shamefacedly.

"Well, Louis, I guess I'll have to thank you. Helen Jane certainly has been a life-saver!"

"Lady, you're telling me!" sighed Louie. He turned to the payoff window and watched Fortnight Capizzi cash the ticket.

THE END

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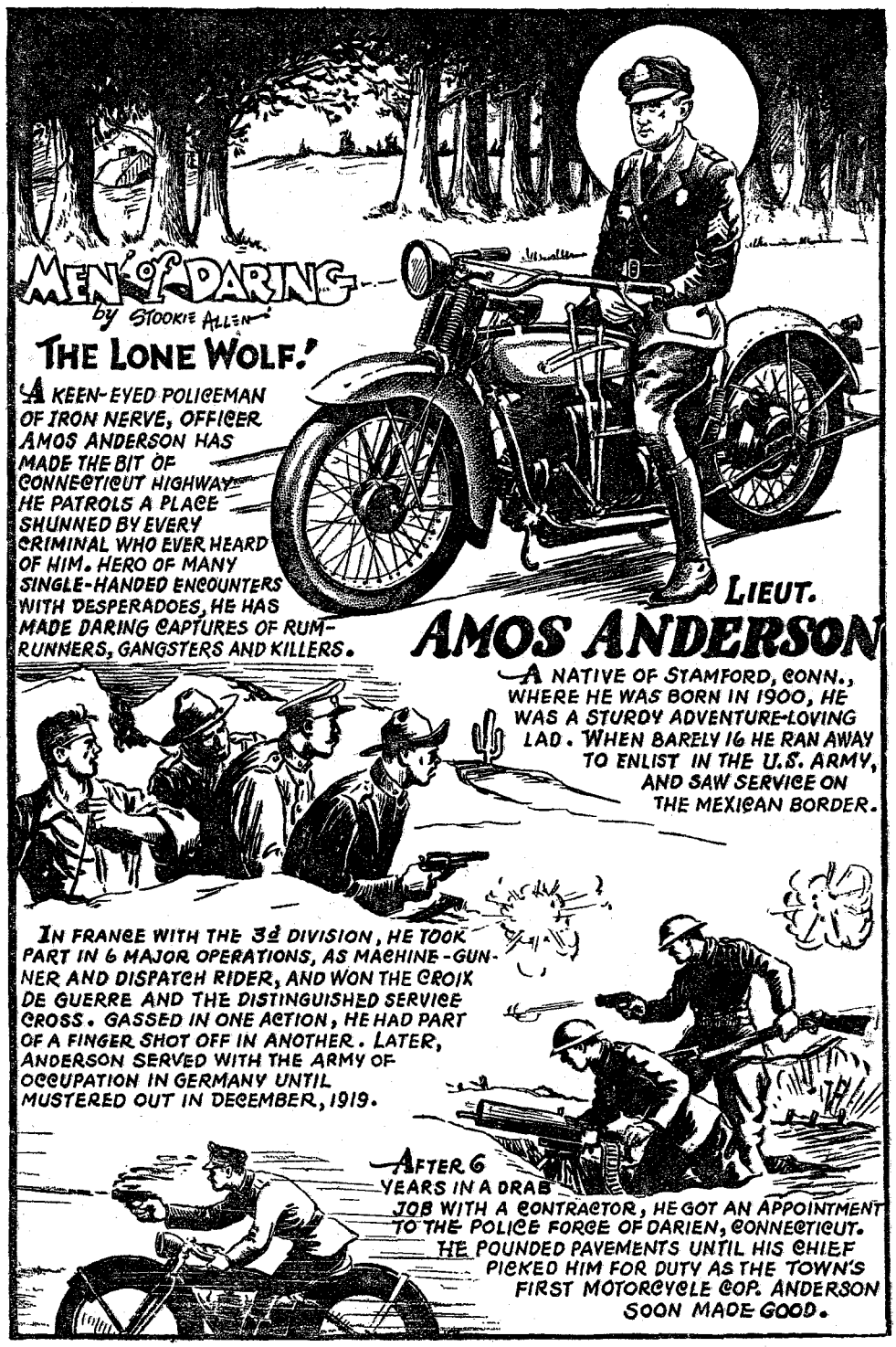
MEN OF DARING
by Stookie Allen
THE LONE WOLF!
A KEEN-EYED POLICEMAN OF IRON NERVE, OFFICER AMOS ANDERSON HAS MADE THE BIT OF CONNECTICUT HIGHWAY HE PATROLS A PLACE SHUNNED BY EVERY CRIMINAL WHO EVER HEARD OF HIM. HERO OF MANY SINGLE-HANDED ENCOUNTERS WITH DESPERADOES, HE HAS MADE DARING CAPTURES OF RUM-RUNNERS, GANGSTERS AND KILLERS.
LIEUT.
AMOS ANDERSON
A NATIVE OF STAMFORD, CONN., WHERE HE WAS BORN IN 1900, HE WAS A STURDY ADVENTURE-LOVING LAD. WHEN BARELY 16 HE RAN AWAY TO ENLIST IN THE U.S. ARMY, AND SAW SERVICE ON THE MEXICAN BORDER.
IN FRANCE WITH THE 3d DIVISION, HE TOOK PART IN 6 MAJOR OPERATIONS, AS MACHINE-GUNNER AND DISPATCH RIDER, AND WON THE CROIX DE GUERRE AND THE DISTINGUISHED SERVICE CROSS. GASSED IN ONE ACTION, HE HAD PART OF A FINGER SHOT OFF IN ANOTHER. LATER, ANDERSON SERVED WITH THE ARMY OF OCCUPATION IN GERMANY UNTIL MUSTERED OUT IN DECEMBER, 1919.
AFTER 6 YEARS IN A DRAB JOB WITH A CONTRACTOR, HE GOT AN APPOINTMENT TO THE POLICE FORCE OF DARIEN, CONNECTICUT. HE POUNDED PAVEMENTS UNTIL HIS CHIEF PICKED HIM FOR DUTY AS THE TOWN'S FIRST MOTORCYCLE COP. ANDERSON SOON MADE GOOD.



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ONE MORNING IN 1926, HE SET OUT AFTER A CAR CONTAINING FOUR MEN. AS HE DREW ALONGSIDE HE NOTICED ONE MAN TOYING WITH A REVOLVER. TURNING AS IF TO ADJUST HIS MOTORCYCLE, ANDERSON WHIPPED OUT HIS OWN PISTOL AND GOT THE DROP ON THE MAN WITH THE GUN. THEN HE DISARMED THE FOUR SUSPECTS AND TOOK THEM INTO DARIEN. ON THEM THE POLICE FOUND MONEY WHICH HAD BEEN TAKEN IN A STORE HOLD-UP IN CAMBRIDGE, MASS. THREE OF THE MEN WERE ALSO WANTED FOR A TRIPLE HOLD-UP MURDER IN BROOKLYN!
PROMOTED TO SERGEANT, ANDERSON CONTINUED AS THE NEMESIS OF CROOKS ON TOUR WHO OTHERWISE MIGHT HAVE PASSED THROUGH DARIEN UNMOLESTED. SOME CALLED HIM THE "COP WITH THE CRAZY NERVE," THE MAN WHO GOT CROOKS ON HIS UNCANNY HUNCHES. PLAYING A LONE HAND, HE CONFISCATED $250,000 WORTH OF LIQUOR AND $10,000 WORTH OF NARCOTICS, OVERAWEING RUM-RUNNERS AND DOPE-PEDDLERS.
IN 1928 ANDERSON, BY THEN DUBBED "THE LONE WOLF" OF THE BOSTON POST ROAD, GAVE A 70 MILE CHASE TO A CAR HE SUSPECTED, AND CAUGHT A NOTORIOUS BAND OF BANDITS. IN 1930, WHILE RACING IN A COMMANDEERED TAXI AFTER SUSPECTED CAR THIEVES, HE WAS HIT BY FIVE BULLETS FIRED AT HIM AS HE OVERTOOK THE CROOKS. HE LAY IN A HOSPITAL FOR MONTHS BEFORE HE WAS ABLE TO WALK AGAIN. RETURNING TO DUTY ANDERSON WAS PROMOTED TO LIEUT. OF DETECTIVES.
TAXI

Next Week: Dr. Frederick H. Law, Globe-trotting Teacher



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# Eagle's Eye

By ALLAN VAUGHAN ELSTON

"Whadda yuh want here?" demanded Sawyer

***Chardell, far from the scene of his crime, thought he had shaken off his past—but who can bury his past when Tom Eagle is on his trail?***

## LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

WAYNE SEEBREE'S valet, Slake, was a constant reminder to Seebree of their first meeting nine years previously on the South Seas tramp steamer, Tonga Belle. Seebree had been picked up from a deserted island on which he had been stranded for seven months. But he had not been alone! Gerry Howden, wealthy New Yorker, had been stranded also when Howden's yacht was wrecked. But Seebree, when being rescued, said nothing about his island companion. Howden had been tending a beacon on the other side of the island. Aboard ship, the wily Slake had noticed a court-plaster pasted on Seebree's back—at a spot on which Seebree's hands could not possibly have reached! That bit of observation was to prove profitable and disastrous for Slake.

Now nine years later, Seebree thought that Howden could hardly have survived on Skull Island. And he had married Howden's widow, Corrine, who had made him president of Howden Motors. Corrine had never liked Slake and wondered why her husband ever employed him as valet.

One night when Slake asks Seebree for a cool hundred thousand, Seebree decides that he will have to do away with Slake. So while Slake is out at Jersey Elms, the secluded country home of the Seebrees, Wayne shoots him. Unfortunately there is a coincidental murder of a young girl, Flora Sawyer, who was employed by the Seebrees during the summer months. Her body is found not far from Slake's. Tom Eagle, District Attorney of this rural New Jersey county, undertakes a minute investigation of the murders.

A few days later, Seebree sees none other than Gerry Howden standing in the corridor of the Howden Building in New York. Unnerved by this reminder of the past, Seebree hires Ray Fritchie as a bodyguard, and decides that he

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must beat exposure by taking speedy flight. Seebree makes the round of the banks in which he holds joint accounts with his wife, and goes to Jersey Elms. After seeing Howden's face peering at him and haunting him, he decides to leave Jersey Elms by car. He is killed by an unknown assailant, and Tom Eagle finds his body just as Eagle had begun to pin on him the murder of Slake.

Ray Fritchie and Gilbert Chardell, the latter a business friend of Seebree's, vanish from New York. And it is only through the slenderest of clues—a poison ivy rash—that Tom Eagle traces Chardell, who has gone off to Seattle with the money contained in the satchels that Seebree took to Jersey Elms. Tom Eagle goes to Seattle and calls at the bank where Chardell has made safety deposit of the money.

## CHAPTER XVII (*Continued*).

### ROBBERY MOTIVE.

EAGLE left Pryde at the bank. He himself, now that he was out here on the West Coast, decided to pay a social call on an old classmate. The classmate was Charles Gunther, a wealthy San Franciscan in the shipping business.

All the way down to San Francisco his mind continued to grapple with the Seebree murder tangle. The more he considered it, the less certain he was that Chardell had both robbed and murdered Seebree. The robbery guilt was well established, but the murder guilt was not a sure thing.

At the offices of the Gunther Steamship Line, Charlie Gunther greeted him like a long lost brother.

"Blow me down if it isn't old Indian Tom!" Gunther exclaimed in delight. "Gosh, you're looking fit, Tom. Bet you could still make seven yards on an off-tackle buck. Sit down and smoke up."

Eagle declined a cigar. "I've been out here on a case, Charlie," he said.

Gunther hitched his chair closer. He was a stout, eager man with bright blue eyes, and the soul of cordiality.

"Well, now that you're here, Tom, I want you to join a little boat trip to Australia. I got a trim little Diesel yacht that rides like an Indian canoe."

Eagle smiled wistfully. "Sorry I can't go, Charlie. Work calls me back home."

"Nonsense. A trip would do you good. Why don't you saw the work off on your deputies, as I do?"

Nell Hope, Eagle reflected, had offered a similar suggestion.

"Tell me about this case you're working on, Tom."

Eagle, at the further insistence of his host, gave a brief account of the case.

"If you ask me, it looks like a finished job," Gunther commented. "You've found the money, haven't you? And you know who stole it."

Eagle did not immediately answer. His gaze was fixed upon an enormous map of the world which covered an entire wall of the shipping man's office. After a moment he crossed the room and stood staring at a definite spot on that map. He put a finger on a certain meridian of longitude and traced it downward. He put another finger on a parallel of latitude and traced it crosswise on the map.

"Charlie," he said, "will you give me a little help?"

"Course I will, Tom. I'll do anything in the world for you."

"Can you ask a clerk to put in a long-distance call for me?"

Gunther promptly rang for a clerk. "Put in a call for Mr. Eagle," he said when the clerk appeared.

"With whom do you wish to talk?" the clerk asked.

"I want to talk with the ticket seller on the night shift at the North Fork, Nebraska, Union Pacific depot," Eagle said.

"I'll have it put through immediately, sir." The clerk went out.

Thirty minutes later Eagle was called to the telephone.

"You were on duty selling tickets the night of May thirtieth?" he asked the man on the other end.

"Yes," he was told.

"A man named Alvin Sawyer came in and bought a ticket west?"

"Yes. I knew Al Sawyer. He used to live here. That was the day he buried his daughter."

"To where did Sawyer's ticket read?"

"San Francisco."

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"That's all. Thank you."

EAGLE turned to Gunther. "A train leaving Nebraska on May thirtieth would reach San Francisco about June first, wouldn't it, Charlie?"

Gunther stared at him. "Okay, Tom. But what about it?"

"How many steamship offices are there in town," Eagle asked, "that run regular passenger boats to Australia and New Zealand?"

"Not so many, Tom. I could count them on the fingers of one hand."

Eagle produced a photograph of Alvin Sawyer. "Could you have a clerk take this photo around to those steamship ticket offices and make an inquiry for me?"

"Sure. What do you want him to ask?"

"Ask in each case if the man in the picture called on or about June first and inquired about passage to any port of the New Hebrides Islands."

"A New Hebrides port? Gosh, Tom, I doubt if any regular liner would stop there. But we'll find out about it."

A clerk was given the photograph and instructions.

In an hour he came back and reported: "Sure. On June first this fellow called at the ticket office of the Krag Lines. He wanted to buy a ticket to any New Hebrides port, but they told him their boats don't stop there."

"If Alvin Sawyer wanted to go there, he went," Eagle said with conviction. "He found a way, even if he had to ship on a freighter."

"What's it all about, anyway, Tom?" Gunther asked.

Eagle was again standing before the wall map, staring at a certain spot on it. "One of Coroner DeQuince's cards," he said slowly, "was found at the scene of the Seebree crime. It must have been dropped by someone who attended the Slake inquest; a stack of such cards were on the table around which witnesses were grouped."

"This man Chardell was at the inquest, was he?"

"Yes. So was his wife. So was Mrs. Howden. And so was a farmer named Sawyer. Sawyer sat directly at the coroner's table, with that stack of cards at his elbow."

"Well?"

"On the other side of the card, in pencil, is what seems to be an automobile license number. We've never been able to explain it."

Eagle produced from his vest pocket a card bearing the notation—N. H. 14-169.

Gunther examined it. "A New Hampshire car, eh?"

"We thought so. But I don't think so now. One of the witnesses was a loquacious old sea captain who described in detail a certain island of the South Seas. Everyone gave him close attention. I think now that someone in the room picked up a card and jotted down certain figures mentioned by the captain."

Gunther stared, still failing to see the connection.

"You say you're about to make a pleasure cruise to Australia?" Eagle asked.

"Sure, Tom. There or anywhere else. Just as lief go one place as another."

"I've changed my mind," Eagle said with decision. "I'd like to go along. I want to go right to this spot."

He put his finger on the map, touching it at the fringe of the New Hebrides Islands.

"N. H. stands for New Hebrides," Eagle explained.

The exact coördinates of the spot under his finger were: Latitude, 14 degrees South; Longitude, 169 degrees East. He recalled now that Skipper Jones had mentioned them as marking the location of Skull Island.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### NO MAN'S LAND.

A TALL, green cone amidst a maze of shallow reefs, Skull Island arose steeply from the sea. Steering cautiously toward it, and now twenty-nine

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days out of San Francisco, came Gunther's Diesel yacht.

An erect man with straight black hair and high, dark cheekbones stood on the foredeck, his gaze focused earnestly upon the spot of land ahead. As yet it was only a point, a blur between the swelling sea and the sky.

Sight of it strangely stirred Tom Eagle. Something inside of him had always yearned for the remote, untrodden places. Now, at the end of the world, he saw one. A true and virgin wilderness. A hunting ground more remote even than any of his own tribal ancestors had ever known. Here was a frontier of mystery west of the setting sun and south of all dreams, and sight of it thrilled the heart of Eagle.

Skull Island! Wayne Seebree had once been here. And Howden. Was any human there now?

Charlie Gunther, round, jovial and sunburned, with hands thrust deep in the pockets of his loose whites, came sauntering up the deck.

"Tom," he said, "it all looks like a brainstorm to me. Why would a farmer like Sawyer go hikin' off to that island?"

"Perhaps he didn't," Eagle said thoughtfully.

"Well, then, what do you expect to find there, anyway?"

Eagle shook back his loose black hair and smiled. "I hardly *expect* to find anything, Charlie," he admitted. "But I've an odd feeling there's something on that island I ought to see. That a secret waits there, somewhere in that jungle."

Gunther, chuckling, pushed a thumb into Eagle's ribs. "You always were a psychic son-of-a-gun, Tom. But what the hell? A cruise is a cruise, and one port is like another." Then, observing the slow caution with which his navigator was threading forward through hazardous reefs, he added, "That is, if you don't get us wrecked, Tom."

He eased himself into a deck chair and lighted a cigar. Eagle continued to stand, gazing straight ahead at the dim profile of Skull Island.

"Do you really think there's a chance Sawyer might be there?" Gunther asked.

"Yes, he may be on the island," Eagle said. "We know that he tried to buy passage to this group; and when an earnest man tries he at last succeeds."

"But why," objected Gunther, "would he want to go to an uninhabited place like Skull Island? He could get there, I'll concede. He could have engaged passage to Tucupio or Mallicolo or some other insular port in the group and then hired natives to land him over on Skull Island. But why? In the name of common sense, Tom, why?"

"I do not know why," Eagle said. "There is this angle, however. Alvin Sawyer has just lost his daughter, Flora. The loss, I think, leaves him sullenly hostile toward the whole civilized world. Perhaps it puts him in a mood to get far away from all human society. Bitter mortification probably enters into it, too, because I think his daughter died a narcotic addict and Sawyer knows it. He knows that she either committed suicide in a thwarted craze for dope, or else was killed in some desperate quest for it. That could easily make Alvin Sawyer ready to despise and reject a society whose vices had inflicted such a loss upon him. He loved the girl. For years he'd been both father and mother to her."

"But gosh, Tom!" Gunther objected. "You don't mean that Sawyer would deliberately maroon himself on an island from which Howden had just escaped?"

"Fritchie or Chardell wouldn't," Eagle admitted. "Strictly urban men of their kind would consider such an isolation unthinkable. But not Alvin Sawyer. Sawyer is a rugged, independent, pioneer type, trained to grub a living from the soil.

"I HAVE a picture of him," Eagle went on, "as he sat at DeQuince's inquest. A wretched, brooding man! And a man stung by shame. The fact that he didn't mention Flora's addiction to marihuana shows that his pride was hard hit by it. Then suddenly he hears Skipper Jones recite the virgin beauties of a South Seas island. A peaceful forest under calm

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skies, with fruit and flowers, far from the vice and greedy traffic of men. It fits exactly with the mood of Sawyer. He hears Jones mention the name of the island group, a latitude and a longitude. So Sawyer, although as yet with only a fanciful idea of using it, takes a card from the table and jots the data down."

"Humph! N. H. 14-169, eh?" exclaimed Gunther. "But you admit the man could only have had a fanciful idea of coming down here."

"At that inquest, yes," Eagle agreed. "But suppose that three days later Sawyer killed Seebree?"

"Ah!" Gunther echoed. "I get you, Tom. If Sawyer killed Seebree, then his fancy might become fact. He would have a practical as well as a sentimental reason for disappearing."

"Sawyer gave me an odd hint of what was in his mind, Charlie," Eagle said, "but I missed it."

"What was that, Tom?"

"When he last called at my office, a book called 'Tricks With Sticks' lay on my desk. I left Sawyer dictating a deposition and went out a little while. When I returned, the book was gone."

"But why did he take it?"

"The book is secrets of Indian woodcraft. It tells how to build a house without nails, how to make a fire without matches, how to catch fish without hooks."

"I see, Tom. Exactly the library a man would need if his mind was set on Skull Island."

The island loomed nearer now. Eagle could see a cliff with spray splashing it. Above the cliff he made out a steep, timbered slope, miraculously green and beautiful. Below, however, the shoreline was studded with forbidding rocks. A million fluttering dots there were birds.

"But what makes you think Sawyer killed Seebree?" Gunther insisted.

"It's hard to believe that he did," Eagle admitted. "I suggest it merely to explain his running away to Skull Island."

"But you explained it by saying he went sour on society."

"That isn't quite strong enough," Eagle said. "It needs something to bolster it—such as a murderer's fear of capture."

"Just what do you think happened to the girl Flora, Tom?"

"I think Slake had made a marihuana addict out of her," Eagle said. "And that as he drove by the farmhouse the last evening of his life he stopped to furnish her with a package of those cigarettes."

"That doesn't seem reasonable," Gunther objected. "Slake's big blackmail play with Seebree was on the fire about that time, so why should he bother with a small sale of dope?"

"Probably to pacify the girl. She'd become crazy for the stuff, had made trips to the city and called for Slake at the kitchen door. That would worry him, because if she exposed him as a dope peddler it would embarrass his major operation against Seebree. The simple way out of it was to slip her a package of the cigarettes. That night he had to pass right by her house anyway."

"But packages of marihuana were found in a suitcase with loot!"

"Yes. Slake no doubt was sent on an errand to Jersey Elms by Seebree. Perhaps Seebree sent him for some summer suits. Anyway Slake took along two suitcases. He carried his stock in trade of marihuana along with him, in an inner pouch of one of the suitcases. Stopping at the farmhouse, he sold or gave one package to the girl.

"I THINK the girl's father saw the transaction. For a long time he must have known Flora was taking dope, must have seen her under the influence of it, but he didn't know its source. That night he probably looked out and saw Flora with a man at the roadside, in the shadow of a parked roadster. Sawyer couldn't see the man's face. By the time he dressed and got out there, the roadster was driving away. Sawyer still failed to see the man's face, but he did manage to write down the number of his car."

"Sounds good so far, Tom," Gunther

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said. "Anyway it accounts for your finding the license number of a Seebree roadster on the Sawyer kitchen table."

"Flora, long denied, was eagerly lighting one of the cigarettes," Eagle pursued. "Sawyer, outraged, took it away from her. He destroyed the entire package and upbraided her, sent her to bed."

"Still okay. What next?" prompted Gunther.

"From there on I'm probably about half wrong," Eagle said. "But the sharpest case I can make is this: that Sawyer was still standing in front of his farmhouse when the same roadster drove by again, going in the other direction. This time Sawyer got a good look at the driver's face. By the license he could see it was the same car; therefore he assumed it was the same driver."

"But we know it wasn't the same driver," Gunther said.

"True. This time it was Seebree. Seebree had waylaid Slake at Jersey Elms, shot him, and was now driving the same car back to New York. But Sawyer didn't know either Slake or Seebree by sight. He was sure now that he saw the man who a little while ago had peddled dope to Flora.

"Let us now presume that Seebree either dropped the gun at his crime or threw it away as he drove along the macadam; that hours later the same night Flora, wandering wildly up and down the road in the frantic hope she might encounter Slake and be resupplied with the narcotic, picked up the gun. And that in her wretched despond, she used it to kill herself."

"But Sawyer denied a suicide!" Gunther objected.

"A fierce, family pride would make him do so," Eagle said. "Probably he found the girl dead with the gun by her hand. He picked it up and threw it as far as he could. Fiercely he resolved that the world should never know his daughter was a self-destroyed addict of narcotics. That, to Sawyer, would bring humiliation upon himself and shame upon his daughter's memory."

"Where does Seebree come into it?"

"Frankly I'm guessing, Charlie," Eagle smiled. "But let us say that four days later Sawyer came face to face with Seebree. He didn't know it was Seebree. But he was mistakenly sure it was the fellow who had stopped Monday night and made a dope sale to Flora. So in a fury of revenge Sawyer shot Seebree. He had no interest in the money. Later Chardell came along, found the money bags there by Seebree's body, took them and made off."

"That's your case?" Gunther challenged doubtfully.

"Don't call it a case, Charlie," Eagle said, "because it's bound to be wrong in spots. The last part of it is really just an effort to reconcile the running away of Sawyer."

The island loomed close now. Gunther's navigator was constantly taking soundings as he picked his way among slightly submerged reefs.

HALF an hour later, anchor was dropped in twelve fathoms.

Eagle was eager to be ashore. "You'll never get a better chance," the navigator said. For the sea was calm except for a single white breastwork of breakers.

A boat was lowered and manned by four expert sailors.

"If a murderer's hiding on the island," Gunther said, "he's watching us right now from the jungle. Better take a gun along, Tom."

But Eagle entered the boat unarmed. He was stubborn about it, insisting also that Charlie Gunther remain on the yacht.

"I'll find either Sawyer or no one," Eagle insisted. "If Sawyer, I want to meet him alone. I want him to talk, and he won't do that if you all crowd around him."

In a few minutes Eagle was being rowed sturdily toward the breakers. The roar filled his ears as he stood in the boat's bow, eyes fixed keenly upon the green slope of jungle. Only a short stretch of

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beach was in sight. Elsewhere arose sheer, spray-pelted cliffs. A small cove, however, was visible at the strip of beach. Eagle could see that it was strewn with huge boulders.

The four seamen worked slowly through swell after swell, steering with skill. Patiently they worked from blue water into white, and then shot hazardously from white water into green. A final surge tossed them into the calm of the cove.

The boat was beached. Eagle's eyes were already at work, looking for footprints on the sand. He saw none, nor any sign that another boat had been recently beached.

At once Eagle prepared to climb the cliff. When the four seamen offered to go along he said: "Please stay here. I shall return soon."

"Mr. Gunther said to stick with you, sir," a sailor protested. "He has an idea you might run into trouble."

"There'll be no trouble," Eagle promised. "If anyone is here, it's a friend and neighbor of mine; a man named Sawyer, discouraged and heart-broken. He's had too much trouble already, and doesn't want any more."

"If he starts anything will you call us, sir?"

"Yes," Eagle said.

Reluctantly the four sailors remained by the boat.

Eagle quickly climbed to a bench of the cliff. Again he failed to find footprints. However he knew it to be a climate of heavy rains. A few hard downpours would obliterate footprints.

That one or more humans had once been here was quickly evident. For he saw an old narrow path, well trodden, leading from the cliff up into the steep jungle. Howden, during his long residence here, had possibly made the path as he came frequently from his crude rock hut to dig clams on the beach.

Eagle took the path immediately, and the fronds of jungle enclosed him. Step by step he advanced through a mass of dense vegetation; the path threaded among coco palms and screw pine, with ferns and blooming flowers in a tangle underneath. Here and there grew great corky trees of a species strange to Eagle, cobwebby trees with moss festooned from lacy foliage. The pathway was dark now. For boughs twined above him and shut out the sky.

TURNING, he could no longer see the sea. He could hear it pounding at the cliff, but a rank green curtain walled it from his sight. From all other directions came an awful, thrilling silence.

Eagle moved on up the path, pausing in the less gloomy places to examine the path. If any man had walked here since torrential rains Eagle was sure to see the sign of it.

He saw none. But at no time had he held any profound belief that he would. Sawyer's preceding him here was possible rather than probable. A conclusion that he had was based mainly on three tips: the N. H. 14-169 card, the purloined Boy Scout book, and the inquiry made by Sawyer concerning passage to the South Seas.

But the motives were weak, Eagle thought. His clearest judgment assured him that if Sawyer had really come to Skull Island he had come in response to some urge far more impelling than any yet conceived.

The path ascended to a summit. Here was a plateau with the trees of bigger bole and not so dense. Casuarina trees, Eagle thought them, although he had never seen them before.

Directly under the biggest of them stood a rude rock hut. The trodden path led straight to its entrance. The wall stones were balanced one upon another, without benefit of mud or mortar. The rafters of it were hand-broken boughs and the roof was sod.

The nine year refuge of Howden. Eagle was promptly certain of that, because it fulfilled a description given him by Howden. Gerald Howden's weary, bare feet must have made this path to the sea.

A cobweb spanned the entrance of the hut. Peering through it, Eagle saw a long,

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weird shape on the floor within. It shocked him. There, outstretched and joined together, lay bones. Legs, an arch of ribs, a skull!

A human skeleton! The teeth of the skull were close set, grinning; and the hollow eyes stared through the web at Eagle.

A skeleton in the house of Howden!

No vestige of flesh or cloth remained. Only the bones were there, together with a few bits of metal which must have been on the man's person at the time of his death.

Eagle remained rigidly outside for silent minutes, staring through the cobweb. Then he brushed the web away. Stooping, he entered the hut and kneeled beside the skeleton. Gradually his eyes became used to the dimmer light.

Then he saw a tarnished gold watch directly under the arch of ribs. A broad, silver belt buckle lay beside it.

With a stick, Eagle raked out both the buckle and the watch. They were rusted. But on each he found the initials, "G. H."

Gerald Howden!

The thought jolted Eagle. If here lay the bones of Howden, then the man in New York was an outrageous impostor!

In the hut was a large flat cube of rock, once used as a makeshift table. On it, rusting, lay a small metal case. Eagle examined this, and saw that it was the container for a first aid kit such as a man might carry in belt or pocket. On this case also were the initials "G. H."

Inside the case was a roll of narrow tape, or court plaster. Howden, Eagle knew, had carried such a thing as this. At least the man in New York professed to have used a piece of this tape to cover a thorn scratch on Seebree's back.

EXCEPT for the man in New York, here was perfect evidence that Gerald Howden had never survived his imprisonment on this island. And now Eagle recalled the whisper of doubt as to whether the returning derelict was really Howden. Only the wife had been entirely sure of him.

Would she still be sure of him if she saw these bones? Would she still be sure if she saw these initialed personals of Howden, here by a skeleton in Howden's house?

More confused than he had ever been in his life, Eagle emerged from the hut.

Then his ear caught the breaking of a twig. He whirled sharply. The face of a man was peering at him from a thicket of jungle. The face was scratched, unshaven, haggard.

"Whadda yuh want here?" demanded Alvin Sawyer.

## CHAPTER XIX.

### PAWN OF DEATH.

SAWYER did not advance. But his stare was sullen and unfriendly. His boots were badly scuffed, his clothing sadly torn by thorns, although Eagle knew the man could not have been long on this island. He knew, too, that Sawyer was sure to have watched the slow approach of Gunther's yacht. Thus he would be aware of the four seamen waiting on the beach.

"What are *you* doing here, neighbor?" Eagle countered.

"No law agin it, is there?" Sawyer said.

"There's a law against murder. Did you kill Seebree?"

"No."

"You didn't confuse Seebree with Slake, and shoot Seebree?"

"No." This denial came with quick emphasis.

Eagle pointed through the entrance of the hut. "Are those the bones of Gerald Howden?"

"No."

"Why are you sure of it?"

Sawyer's eyes narrowed and he asked with caution, "Say, did you come to take me off this island?"

"I came here only to learn truth," Eagle said. "Do you know the truth?"

"Yes, but I ain't tellin' it," the man said.

Eagle went to him and put a hand on his shoulder. "I understand, neighbor," he said gently. "The reason you don't tell is because your daughter used a narcotic and died a suicide for want of it."

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Sawyer winced. His chin sagged and a flush crept upward from his beard. His look now was discouraged rather than sullen. Eagle led him forward into the clear space by the hut. There Sawyer sat down upon a rock, his face buried in hands.

"You see I know about that part of it," Eagle said. "So it leaves you no reason for not telling me the rest."

"I reckon it doesn't," Sawyer muttered.

Eagle stood by with a hand on his shoulder. "Please give me the truth, please," he entreated.

"Guess I might as well, if you know about Flora," Sawyer muttered again.

"Yes," Eagle urged.

"Well, it was like this. Slake figured that Seebree, instead of just deserting Howden here, had murdered him. That's what Slake would 'a' done in a case like that. So he figured Seebree killed Howden."

"How do you know Slake reasoned that way?" Eagle asked. But he saw instantly that a rogue like Slake would naturally make just such an assumption.

"You'll understand how I know it," Sawyer said crossly, "when I get through."

"Very well. Tell it your own way."

"Slake was a cheap crook. Cheap blackmail was just his size, and so he took an overpaid valet's job with Seebree, peddling dope on the side. Like you said, he made a dope user of Flora. Then about a year ago the man higher up in his dope racket came up from old Mexico."

"Chardell?"

"That's right. Chardell."

"Chardell had been wholesaling marihuana from a Mexican base?"

"Yes, and Slake was one of his retail agents. When they got together, Slake bragged about how he was Seebree's valet and Seebree was afraid to fire him. He told Chardell all about it, as one crook to another. Chardell said, 'Why don't you shake him for real money?' Slake said he couldn't, because he didn't have nothing on Seebree except a guess. If Seebree bucked, on a showdown Slake couldn't prove a thing.

"But Chardell was smarter than Slake. He said 'Slake, throw in with me an' we'll make Seebree come across in a big way.' So Slake, last winter, took two months off. Chardell met him on the west coast. They came to Tucupio, a couple hundred miles from here, and hired a beachcomber who had a sea-going motorboat."

"I see," Eagle said. "In order to extort big blackmail from Seebree, Chardell wanted something sturdier than guesses."

"That's right, so they came here in the beachcomber's motorboat. In the rock hut they found everything you see there now, except the skeleton."

EAGLE, after considering the time element, nodded. Chardell, Slake and the beachcomber must have arrived here about February first, since Slake's vacation had been for January and February. But by then Howden himself had been rescued by Polynesian mariners. The original clothing he had worn nine years before would have rotted by then. Metal trinkets such as a watch and a buckle would remain around the hut. Howden, jubilant at the sight of rescue, would not bother to retrieve those rusty, worthless items.

"What did Slake and Chardell do then?" Eagle asked.

"They were disappointed at not findin' any evidence that Seebree killed Howden. They still thought he had done that, but had either buried the body or had thrown it into the sea. While they was talking about it the beachcomber crawled into the hut and went to sleep. 'One skeleton looks just like another,' Chardell said to Slake. Then Chardell knifed the beachcomber in cold blood."

Again Eagle was jolted. "Then this skeleton is the Tucupio beachcomber's!" he exclaimed.

"Chardell stripped the body," Sawyer said. "Next he put Howden's watch and buckle right by it. In this climate they figured they wouldn't be no flesh left in a couple o' months. Then Chardell and Slake went back to New York, ready to put the hooks into Seebree."

Eagle understood perfectly. Slake would

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resume his job as valet. Chardell would improve his acquaintance with Seebree through the social connections of his wife, Estelle.

A minor mystery which had confused Eagle was now clear. Why had Slake and Chardell waited four months after the return from Skull Island? At one time Eagle had assumed that matters had been precipitated by the unexpected reappearance of Howden. Now he was convinced that the plotters had waited four months before demanding large sums from Seebree merely to give time for the beachcomber's body completely to decompose.

"Chardell said the smooth way would be to get big loans from Seebree," Sawyer explained, "then refuse to pay the loans back. If Seebree pressed them, they could tell him Howden's skeleton, or what the world would accept as Howden's skeleton, was in Howden's hut on Skull Island."

Again it was clear to Eagle. While the skeleton would not prove that Seebree had murdered Howden, it would at least prove that Howden had been deserted by Seebree. The desertion itself would be considered morally a murder.

"But I can't see how you know all this!" Eagle puzzled.

"You will in a minute," Sawyer asserted. He went on with his narrative, which from here followed Eagle's case as outlined to Gunther up to the point where Sawyer took a package of dope from his daughter and sent her to bed.

"'Stead of goin' to bed, she slipped out the back way," Sawyer related. "She was wild fer the stuff Slake had, and she knew he'd gone to the big house down the road. So she ran through the woods to get more of it from him. She found him on the porch steps, dying. He was shot clear through, but he lived half an hour after Flora found him."

"Could he talk?"

"YES, and he was cussing Chardell. Slake didn't see who'd stepped out of the dark and shot him in the back. But he was expecting Chardell to try something like that, so he thought it was Chardell."

"Why wouldn't he think it was Seebree?"

"He likely didn't think Seebree had murder stuff in him. He knew Chardell did. He'd seen Chardell knife the beachcomber. He was afraid of Chardell and he wasn't afraid of Seebree."

Eagle readily grasped why Slake should fear Chardell. First, Slake shared a murder secret with Chardell. Second, putting Slake out of the way would double Chardell's stake with Seebree; extorted money would not need to be shared with Slake.

"He lay there dyin'," Sawyer went on, "sure it was Chardell that shot him. That left him only one way to strike back. He could spill the dirt on Chardell, sendin' Chardell to the chair, 'stead of lettin' him get rich off Seebree. So he spilled it to Flora, sketchily, as he lay there bleedin' to death. Flora saw him die.

"Then she run home. On the way she saw a gun 'longside the road. She picked it up and put it in her pocket. She came on home, cryin' crazy, and told me what Slake said.

"I was mad. And ashamed, too, I said, 'Look what you got into now! You admit you was with Slade when he died! They'll say you killed him to rob dope out of his pockets. Even if they don't, it'll come out about you bein' dope crazy, and we're disgraced for life.'"

"What did she do then?"

Sawyer again dropped his face in his hands. A sob escaped him. Eagle saw the man's shoulders shake. "I said awful things to her," he moaned. "And I hadn't oughta said 'em. I said I'd as lief see her dead as to be a dope fiend. I didn't know she had that gun in her pocket. But she did. She went out with a wild look on her face. Pretty soon I heard a shot in the woods."

"She killed herself?"

Sawyer looked up miserably. "She did that, and it tore me to pieces on account of what I said. I couldn't let anyone know. So when I found her I threw the gun as far as I could."

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"But why didn't you tell on Chardell? You had no reason to protect him," Eagle said. "On the contrary, you knew he was head of the dope ring that wrecked your daughter's life."

"I figured I couldn't tell anything unless I told about Flora takin' the dope. And I couldn't bear to do that. And then I soon found out that Slade was wrong about Chardell shooting him."

"Yes," Eagle admitted. "It came out at the inquest that Chardell was at a New York theater with his wife and Mrs. Seebree at the hour Slake was shot."

"So I just kept still about it," Sawyer said.

"Do you know what happened Saturday of that week, when Seebree was murdered?"

"Yes, I know that too." This time Sawyer spoke cautiously. Eagle sensed that the man was approaching a point in his testimony about which he did not intend to be entirely frank. He was avoiding Eagle's eyes now.

"Tell me about it, please," Eagle said.

"Saturday evenin' I saw Chardell sneak by my farm, through the woods, toward Jersey Elms. I'd seen him at the inquest, so I knew him. If I'd 'a' had a gun I'd 'a' shot him. But I never did keep a gun at the farm. So I just picked up a piece of gas pipe and followed him through the woods."

"You would have killed him?"

SAWYER looked up with his haggard face ablaze. "Why not? He sent that dope to Slake and Slake sold it to Flora, didn't he? Slake was dead, but I could still get Chardell. Yes, I was ready to knock him dead."

"You caught up with him?"

"I got there just in time to see him shoot Seebree," Sawyer said.

"Did he see you?"

"No. It was nightfall by then. He put the gun in his pocket, picked up two bags and ran off into the woods. Him havin' a gun and me only a gas pipe, I didn't follow him. Couldn't have found him in those dark woods anyway."

"But you could have reported him to the law," Eagle reminded sharply.

"I tell you I didn't want to drag Flora and the dope in to it," Sawyer said defensively. "So I kept my mouth shut. Next day I took Flora's casket to Nebraska; then I came on here by way of Tucupio."

"Just why did you come here?"

Sawyer shifted uneasily. His eyes, Eagle noticed, were now staring through the portal of the rock hut. A peculiar quality of horror was in the gaze he fixed upon the skeleton there.

"I just wanted to get off by myself and never see folks again," the man said. "I was sick and tired of the whole world, losin' Flora like I did."

His manner was convincing. Although Eagle himself had suggested such a motive to Gunther, he now more than ever doubted it. The consideration might occur to Sawyer, and tempt him, but it would hardly drive him to this far place.

"Second," Sawyer said, "afore I left the States I read where a lot o' folks weren't any too sure about Howden. There was talk he wasn't really Howden. I got to thinkin', suppose they came down here and found the skeleton planted by Slake and Chardell! It'd make trouble for the Howdens."

"That is true," Eagle admitted.

"So I figured it was my duty to come bury these bones outa sight. That way I could make up a little for not tellin' what Slake said to Flora. Mrs. Howden, she was good to Flora when Flora worked there. I figured I was the only one who could keep this skeleton scandal, some day, from bustin' square in her face."

Again Eagle was inclined to discount the motive. It assumed a character of knight-errantry which did not fit this discouraged farmer. Sawyer was brooding on too many troubles of his own to concern himself actively with the Howdens.

"You are not telling me the truth," Eagle said. "Because if you came here to put the skeleton out of sight you would have done so. Now tell me the real reason you came to Skull Island."



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Sawyer compressed his lips stubbornly. But his eyes were still fixed in an expression of mixed doubt and horror upon the skeleton.

Then the truth of his motive flashed to Eagle.

"You came here, Sawyer," he said, "because you suspect that these are the bones of your son Floyd."

SAWYER'S face went white. Before he could answer Eagle went on quickly: "You doubted that one detail of Slake's story to Flora. You knew Floyd was last seen in January driving west with Chardell. You knew Floyd was an expert mechanic, always tinkering with motors. A motor boat brought Chardell and Slake here from Tucupio. Floyd, already working for Chardell, was the logical person to run it. So you couldn't rest until you found out the truth."

Sawyer stood up and flung out his arms. His face was strained with a terrible anxiety. "I couldn't and I can't!" he cried. "Because I don't know it yet."

"Whether it's Floyd?"

"I can't tell," Sawyer said wretchedly. He stared into the hut at the skeleton. Then his fists clenched and his face was livid. "If it is, I'll kill Chardell with my own hands."

Eagle clearly understood now why Sawyer had not called in the police. If this Skeleton was Floyd's, if his own son and not a Tucupio beachcomber was Chardell's pawn of death, then no fate must await Chardell except one served out by Sawyer himself.

"I don't know yet!" Sawyer repeated in a wail. "I thought one look would be enough, but I can't tell even now."

"How long have you been on the island?" Eagle asked.

"About two weeks, maybe."

"What boat brought you here?"

"A Singapore freighter headin' for Auckland. The skipper promised to stand offshore when he passes again, a month from now, and watch for my signal."

"You only planned to stay a month?"

"An hour would be enough if I could be sure about Floyd," Sawyer said. "But I can't. Not by those bones. So I've been looking for something else."

"What?"

"Floyd always rolled his own wheatstraw cigarettes one right after another. If he was on this here island even one day, he threw away at least thirty snipes. If I could find just one I'd know he'd been here."

"You haven't found any wheatstraw snipes?"

"No, thank God!"

"Did your son ever break an arm or a leg, or have a tooth crowned?"

"Not that I know of."

Eagle again crawled into the hut to inspect the evidence. Except that it was the skeleton of a tall male it told him nothing. The shape of the skull indicated an intelligent Nordic. But either Floyd Sawyer or a Tucupio beachcomber might be an intelligent Nordic.

"I can't help rememberin'," Sawyer muttered when Eagle emerged from the hut, "that Floyd dropped out of sight just when Slake and Chardell went away for two months. And Floyd was last seen drivin' west with Chardell."

EAGLE put a consoling hand on his shoulder. "Please get this revenge idea out of your head, won't you? Leave Chardell to the law."

"But the law might slip!" cried Sawyer. "They ain't many murderers hanged, I notice. Most of them get off scot free, or they just do time behind bars. I don't want Chardell put behind bars where I can't get at him."

"But promise me you'll give up that idea," urged Eagle gently.

"No. I'll kill him if he killed Floyd."

"Suppose you never know!"

"I'd go crazy," Sawyer said.

"Yes, you'd go crazy if you had to live all your life without ever knowing whether these bones are Floyd's. If I answer that question for you, definitely, will you promise to leave Chardell to the law?"



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Sawyer turned and clutched wildly at Eagle. "You know? Then tell me! Tell me if it's Floyd."

"I'll tell you if you promise to forego personal revenge."

The suspense of that issue was too much for Sawyer. "Yes, I promise. I'd promise anything to find out for once and all if it's Floyd."

A minute or more ago Eagle's sharp eyes had discerned a tiny cube of pink half hidden under a leaf. It was a thing foreign to this insular wilderness, and lay just outside the rock hut at the base of the big casuarina.

Now Eagle went over and picked it up. He exposed it in his open palm to Alvin Sawyer.

What he held was a small cube of pink ivory with one to six black dots on each face. It was the half of a pair of dice. The mate to it at this moment lay in Floyd's room at the Kittatinny farm.

A heartrending throw of dice for Alvin Sawyer! He took the thing in his hand, knew it, then flung himself face down on the ground, sobbing bitterly.

"Now you can go home with me," Eagle said gently. "But you must leave Chardell to the law."

"You sure you can catch him?" Sawyer wailed pitifully.

"Yes. At a Seattle bank. And even if we miss him there," Eagle promised, "I know still another place where we can trap Chardell."

## CHAPTER XX.

### AMBUSH.

GILBERT CHARDELL stood before the mirror in his room at Tacoma, Washington, U. S. A. His fingertips stroked over his dark, handsome face, and he saw that the last trace of poison ivy was now healed. No longer need he feel conspicuous.

He recalled with a rueful grimace that day he had arrived in Seattle with his cheek a red welt of rash. The thing had frightened him, had made him imagine that all eyes were regarding him curiously. After getting the money stowed safely in a bank box, however, his strain of apprehension had been relieved.

He sat down now and read the latest newspaper from cover to cover. He had done so daily since his flight from New York. Not a word had he seen directing attention in the Seebree case to Seattle. Tonight there was no report on it at all. The matter was getting cold, Chardell reflected with satisfaction.

Earlier reports had, of course, mentioned his own disappearance. But by the same reports Ray Fritchie and Alvin Sawyer had also vanished from the scene. No definite suspicion seemed to be directed toward himself, Chardell.

Estelle, of course, was wondering about him. But that couldn't be helped. He didn't dare go back to her. After all there were plenty of other women in the world.

Sawyer was the real hazard! Everything was all right except the risk of being exposed by Sawyer. And Sawyer, the fool, had rushed off to the South Seas!

Or had he? Was that letter from Nebraska a pure bluff?

Chardell took the letter from his pocket. Sitting down on his bed he read it for the twentieth time. He recalled his amazement and panic upon receiving it in New York. It had sent him in pellmell flight without even a good-by to Estelle. The letter said:

*Gilbert Chardell:*

*Where is my son Floyd? He was last seen driving west with you. I saw you shoot Seebree. Before that you went with Slake to an island and killed a man there, so people would think his bones were Howden's.*

*But maybe they are Floyd's!*

*How do I know? I will go all the way to that island and find out. If you killed my boy, then watch out, Gilbert Chardell!*

*Alvin Sawyer.*

Chardell crunched the letter in his palm.

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It was a dangerous thing to have around, he realized. He should have destroyed it long ago. He did so now, burning the paper to an ash.

How, he wondered, had the confounded farmer found out about his trip with Slake to Skull Island? Slake must have told him, he concluded, for only Slake knew. Or maybe Slake had told the girl and the girl had relayed the story to her father. Anyway, Sawyer knew the truth. His accuracy proved it.

But the poor devil, even if he went to the island, would find only bones there. Tropic heat after four months would leave nothing but bones.

In time Sawyer's zeal or personal revenge would burn itself out. Then he would tip the police. That in turn would put a tremendous heat on Chardell's trail.

Chardell shrugged. Well, one thing at a time. Right now he must go to Seattle and reclaim the money from the bank box. He was about out of funds. Buying a new car yesterday had almost stripped him.

The new car was registered in the name of Charles Hansen. In the morning he embarked in it and drove to Seattle. Arriving there he parked in front of the Puget Sound Trust Company.

"Let's see," he consulted a receipt for box rental. "Yes, Roy Clark was the name I used here."

From his vest pocket he fished a key to the box. Then, just as he was alighting from his car, the face of a man inside the bank shocked him.

Through the plate glass window Chardell had a clear view of the bank lobby. The usual lines of customers were at the grills. But the face which shocked Gilbert Chardell was one he had seen at a coroner's inquest in New Jersey.

Pryde! That was the name, he recalled, and the fellow was a deputy sheriff. What was he doing in a Seattle bank?

THERE could only be one answer. It meant that the Howden money had been traced here. Pryde was posted to await the coming of a thief for his loot. A trap, beyond any doubt, for Roy Clark! And Chardell could now see that Pryde, lounging on a bench at one side of the lobby, was talking with a square-toed, tough-chinned fellow who was of course a local plainclothesman.

Blood drained from Chardell's face. Suppose he had walked into that bank!

Instead, he drove rapidly away. At a tourist camp on the edge of town he rented a cottage. There, raging at his luck, he spent the night. It looked like he must abandon that money. Yet by morning he had a plan.

Shortly after noon of that same day a junior clerk in charge of the safety box department of the Puget Sound Trust Company looked across his counter to confront a customer. The customer appeared to be a hunchbacked Italian. A musician, probably, because he carried a violin case. The man was swarthy. He had wiry pompadour hair and waxy mustaches.

"I have one ver' fine violin, signor," the customer said, "which I like keep safe in bank, yes? It ees make by the great Signor Amati heemself, these violin." He opened the case and exposed a violin with a proud gleam in his eyes. "You have strong box, my frien'?"

The clerk's smile was slightly amused. "We rent safety boxes by the year. Do you want one?"

"The bank robber they no get these violin out?" the man asked anxiously.

"Not a chance," the clerk assured him. "But a box big enough to get that fiddle in will cost you ten bucks per annum."

The hunckback produced an old wallet from beneath the tail of his seedy frock coat. From this he took ten dollars.

"Okay. Just fill out this application."

Chardell filled the card out. The name he signed was "Pietro Bacigalupo."

The clerk gave him a receipt for a year's box rent in advance, and a key. The key was numbered 266. It much resembled one numbered 189 which was already in Chardell's pocket.

"This way, Mr. Bacigalupo." The clerk opened a brass grill door. Then he ushered

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Chardell down marble steps to a basement corridor. The safety box vault was at the far end of this corridor.

When they were in the vault, the clerk pointed to a box numbered 266. "This is yours, Mr. Bacigalupo. It takes two keys to open it. Yours and mine. Your key goes in the top keyhole, mine in the lower one; like this."

The clerk tolerantly demonstrated to this poor old hunchbacked musician who, presumably, had never before had occasion to make use of a bank box.

As he did so, a silken noose was looped over his head and drawn tight.

The clerk gasped and turned pale. His lips moved, but made no sound. The noose was choking him. Then a club struck heavily on his head and he fell stunned to the floor.

EVEN then Chardell took no chances. He loosened the noose. But from the violin case he brought a towel and a bottle. The bottle contained chloroform. Chardell soaked this into the towel and applied it to the clerk's nose.

Now he reasoned that he could count on five or ten uninterrupted minutes. The keys to box 266 did not interest him. Neither did the violin, which he had picked up at a pawnshop for five dollars, and which he now kicked aside.

From his vest pocket he produced the important key, which fit the lower keyhole in box 189. He then found that the bank's key for the upper keyhole of 266 did not fit the upper keyhole of 189. But the clerk had in his possession a ring of keys, and one of these was numbered 189.

With it and his own Chardell unlocked the loot box. He took out the Howden money and packed it in the violin case.

Leaving the clerk unconscious on the vault floor, Chardell went out with the violin case in hand. He ascended the marble steps and passed through the brass grill door. Now he was in the main lobby. He saw Deputy Pryde of New Jersey seated over on a bench, talking to a person with square toes and a tough chin.

With his frock-coated back hunched, the customer, who seemed to be a foreign musician, passed directly by them and out of the bank. His car was around the corner. Chardell locked the violin case in the trunk at the rear of the car. He drove five blocks, turned into an alley. When he emerged from the alley he no longer had waxy mustaches or pompadour hair. His face was not swarthy.

He drove quickly to the tourist cabin. There he remained under cover until dark. Then he drove to Tacoma.

Snugly housed at Tacoma, he waited for the morning papers. In the news accounts, to his considerable relief, the name of Chardell was not mentioned. The public was informed that eastern loot pertaining to the Seebree-Howden case had been traced to the Puget Sound Trust Company. A man named Roy Clark had stored it in a box there. And yesterday, while officers were in the bank watching for Roy Clark, a person calling himself Pietro Bacigalupo had looted the box.

Opinions differed as to whether Pietro Bacigalupo was a confederate of Roy Clark, or Roy Clark himself. There was no suggestion in the comment that Clark or Bacigalupo might be Gilbert Chardell.

All of which immensely gratified Chardell. He permitted himself to hope that no more definite suspicion was attached to himself than was attached to Fritchie, Sawyer or others. At any rate he was safely away with the money. Now he had no rashed face to make him conspicuous. And after this he would keep away from banks.

A bank, he realized, is a trap. It was safer to keep the money locked in the trunk of his car.

That night he drove to a mountain resort near Spokane, where he rented a cabin. Only the hazard of Sawyer worried him now. Where was that infernal farmer, anyway? Had he really gone to Skull Island?

Day after day Chardell sat tight in his cabin. Once a week he went into Spokane where he bought New York, Philadelphia and Seattle papers. He read every item of news. Generally he found nothing about

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the Howden case, for other sensations were crowding it out of print.

CHARDELL counted his money—almost three hundred thousand dollars. It meant easy street for life, he reflected, except for the menace of Alvin Sawyer. Sawyer! Chardell winced every time that name came to his mind.

Always the memory of Sawyer's letter came back to confuse success, and to haunt him. Sawyer knew the truth. But the police didn't. Clearly, Sawyer was keeping his own counsel, nursing some mad plan for direct retribution.

Some day, however, he would talk. Chardell felt sure of that. In time the man's secret would burst from him. Then every cop from coast to coast would be on the lookout for Chardell.

Where was Sawyer? The question constantly irked Chardell.

Finally he saw the man's name in the news.

Alvin Sawyer, he read, had just returned to his farm near Kittatinny after an extended absence. Questions by the police absolved him of all connection with the Seebree murder. Sawyer, the news item said, had merely gone to Nebraska on the errand of burying his daughter, after which he had toured the West with the vague idea of taking up cattle ranching. Discouraged on that venture, he was now back at the old farm.

"And still keeping his mouth shut!" muttered Chardell. "But for how long? Probably he's keeping still so they won't find out his girl took dope. But some day—"

Chardell brooded. And gradually the inevitable solution of the Sawyer problem worked into his brain.

There was one way to settle it, he decided, and one only.

That night Chardell drove east. The money was still locked in the car trunk. Night after night he drove persistently, arriving early one morning at Scranton, Pennsylvania. At a Scranton sporting goods store he purchased a repeating rifle.

With this he drove to a resort at Lake Owassa, in the northwest corner of New Jersey. From this point it was only an hour's easy drive to the farm of Alvin Sawyer.

When dark came again, Chardell set forth to deal finally with Sawyer.

He avoided Kittatinny. Sawyer's farm, he knew, was on a macadam road leading westerly from that town.

Another road paralleled it two miles to the north, with a stretch of wooded pasture in between.

Chardell took the north road. When he was directly opposite the Sawyer farm he drove his car a little way into the woods. There was moonlight. Chardell took his rifle, locked the car and set forth afoot south through the woods.

He had to grope, but he knew the general direction. Trees, like tall, multi-armed shapes, loomed about him. Chardell threaded through them, cautiously. In all the woods there was no whisper of sound except as his own feet crunched the leaves and grass.

This approach, he assured himself, was perfectly safe. He could creep up on Sawyer's farmhouse by the back way. The man would be alone there. Chardell could knock at the kitchen door. When Sawyer opened it he could shoot the man down.

At last he saw the light of the house. Chardell moved from tree to tree, toward it, like a stygian shadow. He saw a lighted window. The window was open. Beyond it was a reading lamp—and by the lamp sat Alvin Sawyer. The man's eyes were on an open book, and his face was in direct profile to Chardell.

Chardell now realized that he wouldn't even need to knock at the door. Sawyer was posed perfectly, a set-up target there at that open window. Chardell pumped a shell into the chamber of his rifle.

He moved closer. The wood on this side extended within fifty yards of the farmhouse. At the last tree Chardell stopped and took aim. He was a good shot. Now he caught the side of Sawyer's head accurately in his sights.

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His finger squeezed on the trigger. The rifle barked. At the same instant Chardell felt himself jolted. His aim went wild. He whirled in a panic as he felt the rifle snatched from his hand.

His knees shook and fear seared his brain as he stared into the gloom of the trees. Then he made out a dark figure, tall and straight and still, directly at his right.

It moved. It was a man.

"Who are you?" gasped Chardell.

"I am an Indian," Tom Eagle said.

THE END

## *Fire Walkers*

THE Fijians of today are among the most civilized of all the South Sea Islanders. But, although they are practically all Christians, they cling stubbornly to many of their old customs. One of these is the performance of the fire walkers. On the island of Beqa is a circular pit approximately twenty-five feet in diameter. The bottom is lined with volcanic stones and when a fire walk is to be staged the pit is filled with dry wood and a fire is kept up until the stones are red hot. Then the glowing coals are brushed aside and out of the forest comes a procession of young men, their bodies smeared with coconut oil and garlanded with flowers. Slowly they tread over the hot stones, chanting as they go. Then they disappear into the dense woods, apparently unhurt. After they have gone, whole pigs and vegetables are placed on the hot stones and covered wtih leaves and earth. Soon a well-cooked feast is ready for both spectators and performers.

Scientists say that the volcanic stones used are poor conductors and that they radiate heat quickly. Owing to this the surface cools sufficiently to permit the fire walkers to tread the stones, though they retain enough heat inside to cook the feast. At any rate, nothing in the world will persuade the fire walkers to tread on hot limestone, which is a good conductor and a poor radiator of heat. However, even the scientists admit that walking over the hot stones is quite a feat, and the thickness of the skin on the soles of the natives' unshod feet no doubt accounts in great measure for the "miracle."

—*Carl C. Mellor.*


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Norma Millen


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It was grand until Buck sat on a cactus

# When Buckaroos Strike

By HOWARD R. MARSH

*Rebellion, Long Slim Long discovers, is like a snowball going downhill—it can very easily get out of hand*

LONG SLIM LONG was the organdizer of our cowboy union. He called it the A.U.O.I.C.F.R.A.B.E., which was short for Amalgamated Union of Independent Cowboys, Fence-Riders and Buckaroos. The last E was put in extra, he said, because it was the only vowel, excepting Y and sometimes W, he hadn't used in the title and, he said, the New Deal was a grand success because of letters and so maybe the more letters we cowboys had in our union the better was our chances of success.

Trouble with Long Slim Long was that he read the newspapers, often as not within a week or 2 after they was hot from the press.

A full year ago he began to get excited about labor troubles and strikes and wages and fool things like that. Then last month he saw where some shirt-makers back in New Jersey had struck for a 30-hour week—and got it.

"Just 30 hours!" snorted Long Slim Long, pulling at his spread-eagle mustache. "Us boys work that much during 2 days in the spring rodeo and come again fall. Between times," he said, "we put in a 84-hour week near as I can figure. It just depends on how long it is between sun-up and sun-down, but it'll sure average 12 hours a day. Besides," he said, "think



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of the dissanitary working conditions and the right to make your own bargains, 'collection of bargains,' it's called. Think of that," he said. "Think hard!"

Us boys around the campfire started thinking hard. "I got a dozen bandannas over at Quartz Siding Emporium for 95 cents and corn-plasters 6 for a dime," said Ramon Chico, the little Mex, adding up his collection of bargains.

"That mail-order concertina of mine," said Buck Forensee. He's big and musical and sad. "Best buy I ever made," he said.

"I got a divorce," said Sail-Ear Perkins, "for 25 dollars. And no alimony. Speaking of bargains," he said.

"You're dumb," said Long Slim Long. Just then a coyote let loose in the foothills not 50 yards away and we didn't hear much of what he said except, "—and you bargain for your wages, going into the boss as a collection," he said.

WELL, we sure was a collection, our gang on the Terrapin Rancho; we ran from 88-pound Ramon Chico with the temper of a runt bobcat to 288-pound Buck Forensee who was like to break down and cry when he saw a calf wailing for its mama cow. In between those 2 we had 9 other assorted lathes and beer-barrels. Having such a nice collection, we decided to organdize our union. Besides, we'd been lying around snoozing most all of that day and wasn't ready yet to turn in for the night.

"Wages out here on the desert ain't changed in 20 years," said Long Slim Long, very solemn. "Not much. It used to be 30 dollars a month and found for a cow hand; now it's 30 dollars a month and found. And working conditions are just the same, and—"

"The desert don't change much," said Sail-Ear Perkins. "And a hoss is always a hoss. Them's our working conditions—the desert and hosses."

"And then the dissanitary conditions," said Long Slim Long, pretending he hadn't heard Sail-Ear.

"For instance," said Buck Forensee.

"Sirrup, for instance," said Long Slim Long. "We used to get brown sirrup for our flap-jacks. Some said it was maple sirrup. At least it was brown. Now what do we get? We get white sirrup, simple sirrup. And we're simple to get it," he said. "Besides, there's the leak in the bunkhouse roof. That's strictly dissanitary."

"It don't rain here once in 2 years," said Buck Forensee. "But I get the idea."

"All we got to do is organdize," said Long Slim Long, "and get rid of the invincible living conditions under which we starve on mere pit tents; we got to organdize and bargain by collections with Boss Keith. We threaten to strike if he don't cut our hours from 84 a week to 80 the first year, and 4 hours each year hereinafter named until we get down to a 30-hour week."

"*Ay de mi,*" sighed Ramon Chico, "we get old prett' damn' fast when each week only have 30 hour, eh?"

But the rest of us got Long Slim Long's idea and there wasn't any excitement in sight anyway till the Salinas rodeo, so we decided to organdize the A.U.O.I.C.F.R. A.B.E. We'd get the Duckfoot boys joined up with us, and also the Crazy-B, the Red Mountain and Diamond-Arrow outfits. That meant that most of 2 counties was being organdized in 1 big cowboy labor union. It sure sounded good. We didn't none of us know what terrible hell was going to pop just because of Long Slim Long's bum idea.

LONG SLIM LONG pretended he had to mend some fences over Jaw-Bone Cañon way, but he was really calling on the Crazy-B boys, organdizing them. Long Slim was all het up about the new union and already had got a chapter started on the Red Mountain rancho. While he was gone, Buck Forensee and me promised to call on Boss Keith and present our list of griefs and demand rebatement of nuisances and the right to collection of bargains. We was already learning the proper terms of nology, you see, because Long Slim read them to us out of the papers.

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Boss Keith was waiting in what he calls his office at the ranch house when me and Buck braced him. I turned my attention to Eloise Keith. She's a 3-year-old and we played mugwump while the other 2 was talking.

I made up that game myself. I say "mug" and blow my cheeks full of air and she says "wump"" and hits my cheeks with her hands and I blow out "poof" real loud and she laughs.

"Never mind the 2 kids, Buck," said Boss Keith, staring out the window and looking some worried. "I know what you're here for, so shoot!"

"First," said Buck Forensee, coming to the point, "our hours are unhuman. We demand an 80-hour week instead of 84 hours."

"What'll you do with the extra 4 hours?" asked Boss Keith.

"Well," said Buck, "there's always some fences needing mending or a hoss with a hock bruise or a lariat to fix. We could work at odd jobs like that in our extra time."

"All right," said the boss, looking out over the desert again, "you win. You get an 80-hour week. Next?"

"Do we or do we not have the right to collection of bargains?" said Buck Forensee.

Boss Keith looked some dazed at that one but he faced the issue. "Why not?" he said.

"Good," chirped Buck, feeling good. "Next comes our list of griefs. First, we demand brown sirrup instead of white."

"Molasses is cheaper anyway," the boss said. "No trouble there, boys. I'll tell Wong Tong."

"The hole in the bunkhouse roof is dissanitary," said Buck. "Or would be if it rains."

The boss kind of stuck on that 1, but he gave in at last. "All right," he said. "You 2 repair it this afternoon. And while you're at it," he said, "you better paint the bunkhouse, too, and give the corral posts a coat of creosote and then come up here and paint the office floor and give the windows a fresh trim coat and then clean out the rat's nest of stuff in the tool-house."

Well, we'd won our way so far, so Buck came out with the worst demand of all. "Wages," he said. "A 10 percent increase. Else," he said, "the A.U.O.I.C., etc., will put on a strike which will shake the whole cow country." He had that speech all made up, because I heard Long Slim Long rehearsing him the night before.

Boss Keith shook his head. "Boys," he said, "cattle are worth nothing-minus on the hoof. I'm losing money every month. The only way I can increase your wages is to cut down the size of the outfit. But I'll do it if you insist." He took a pencil and paper and started figuring. "Now 11 of you boys at 30 dollars a months is 330 dollars," he said. "If I drop 1 of you and increase the others 10 per cent each that's 330, too. All right, boys, I'll do it. Sure I will. Long Slim Long will have to go, I guess," and he seemed real sad at the thought.

JUST then Buck had a big idea. "I don't see why he'll have to go," he said. "Or anyone else. You just raise all our wages 10 per cent. Then to pay Long Slim Long we each will chip in 3 dollars a month. Say," he said and looked real happy, "we all 11 would get just the same amount as each other that way, wouldn't we?"

"That's right," the boss said. "You're quick at figures, Buck. You ought to be a bookkeeper or something for your union."

Boss Keith stood up. "If that's all, boys, the conference is over. Only before you go I want to tell you 1 or 2 things. In these negotiations you've won every point. I'm giving you everything you asked. No compromises, no nothing. Now in turn, boys, I sure got the right to ask for support from you. Support and loyalty. Ain't that so?"

"You sure have," said Buck Forensee. "Boss, you're okay."

Boss Keith stuck out his hand and we both shook it and then we went out, walking on air. When we got to the bunkhouse

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Long Slim Long was there. He sure was happy, too. He had got another chapter organdized at the Crazy-B outfit.

"The movement's spreading like the hoof-and-mouth disease," he said. "It's just grand. Now when we get the Diamond-Arrow outfit we'll have the strongest union in the State. Today I arranged to get Standard School No. 22 for Sunday afternoon, and I'm calling a general meeting of all the unions."

"What for?" said Buck Forensee. "We already got our griefs rebated."

"To organdize in formal session," said Long Slim. "We got to use Roberts' Rules for Orders, first, and elect officers and a walking delegate, for instance."

"No one will take that job," Sail-Ear Perkins said. "No decent cowboy is going to do no walking."

"He'll have to," said Long Slim. "That's his job and he'll have to sacrifice himself and his pride. Then I thought we might adopt some signals, like wiping your nose, and an official union handshake. Maybe a special costume, too, like a special bandanna or a funny kind of sombrero for our union."

"I know," said Buck Forensee, real enthusiastic. "It's called a union suit."

"You ain't mixing up your A.E.I.O.U. and sometimes Y and W with a Mason's lodge, or something, are you?" said Sail-Ear Perkins.

"Every union," said Long Slim Long, "has got to be proper organdized to fight its brave fight against the capital class, that's why I called this meeting. I stopped at the county seat today, too, and asked the paper to put the announcement of our Sunday's meeting in this week's edition. How's that?" said Long Slim.

Well, it was bad, that's what it was—only we didn't know how bad it was at the time. On Sunday, though, we began to suspect it was beginning to get bad.

THE Sunday meeting started out grand. All the boys from the 5 big ranches was there and a lot of other buckaroos from the smaller outfits. One sheep man came too, only we threw him out early.

First on the program Buck Forensee versus against Indian Pete Brazo of Red Mountain. Those 2 elephants can't get on the same square mile without putting on a show. First Indian Pete hit Buck playful on the chest to see what shape he was in. Buck clapped Indian Pete on the back in a friendly kind of way. Then Pete lifted up Buck's chin to look under it and Buck pushed Pete in the face with his open hand, just to back him up a little. Next Pete took a playful pass at Buck and Buck didn't ward it good enough so he got tunked on the jaw. Right away they was at it, heavyweight catch-as-catch-can. Two big giants battling for blood. It was a grand act until Buck sat down on a cactus and we all had to look for pliers to get the spines out of his sitter. That ended that fight which sure was grand and bloody.

Next, Texas Sam of the Crazy-B showed us how he kept tin cans bouncing in the air with that old Luger automatic of his. It was swell. Cockney Bill from the Diamond-Arrow did his rope act and if he ain't a Will Rogers I don't know who he is.

We sure had had a top-notch time and was ready to go home when all of a sudden an automobile came driving up, rattling and snorting and puffing like a hoss with the heaves. In it was 4 guys, little fellows, and they needed haircuts worse than a cowboy generally does. Shaves, too.

"Is this the Coyboys' Union we read about in the paper?" 1 of them said, leaping out of the car like a flea from a bunk.

Long Slim Long stepped forward. "It is," he said. "The A.U.O.I.C.F.R.A.B.E."

"Let's go inside," the little fellow said and he turned to the other guys behind him. "Bring the literature."

They filed into the school house and we all trailed after them, thinking maybe we was going to see a medicine show or minstrels or something. After we got sat down at the kids' desks and on window sills 1 of those city guys began to talk. After a while another 1 talked and then he introduced another 1 who was the greatest talker

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of them all. It seems they was agitadors, which I guess come from the Spanish bullfighters, like matadors and picadors.

Well, don't ask me how it happened but in about 1 hour and 45 minutes those agitadors had us cowboys so sorry for ourselves and our pit tents and our unhuman conditions that we was ready to cry, and in 15 minutes more they had us so mad about our being wage slaves and beasts of the jungle that we was ready to raise hell.

THE last guy got through orating and said, "That grand move started at the Terrapin Rancho. So we'll picket that rancho first."

"We already got a good wire fence," Buck Forensee said. "Good posts, too. We don't need no pickets over there."

"Come on!" the agitadors said and got in their car and yelled, "Come on!" So we all climbed aboard our ponies and headed for the Terrapin. Only the guys from the other ranches said we had to do our own fence-work, and they left us.

At the front entrance near the ranch house the agitadors told Buck to go and tell Boss Keith that we was all striking and that we was picketing. Buck came back in a minute and said, "Boss Keith wants to know what we're striking for. I forgot the answer to that!"

"For the rights of humanity," an agitador said.

So Buck went back in and told Boss Keith. When Buck came bursting out of the ranch house he was red in the face and rubbing his sitter, already sore with cactus spines, because when Boss Keith gets mad he gets mad.

Under orders of our new leaders we moved out of the bunkhouse that night and into a deserted homesteader's shack across the road. Boss Keith came over to see us but the agitadors met him at the road and sent him back. Then an hour later the boss came chugging out in the station wagon, sitting behind the wheel stiff and mad and white.

"He's going after scabs," the agitadors said and seemed happy about it.

Except on our knees or somewhere we Terrapin boys had never seen any scabs and we got to wondering what they was and if they was contagious like some of the cattle diseases.

SCABS, we found out, are city guys that are white in the face, look hungry and can't sit on a hoss. Boss Keith brought 15 of them back from the county seat. Some of them was high school boys and some of them was grandfathers but they all was lean and hungry and none of them knew a pommel from a salt lick.

When those scabs drove up the 4 agitadors ran out in the middle of the road and tried to stop the car. "Come on, boys!" they yelled. "Beat up these skunks! They're stealing your jobs!"

"Go lie down!" yelled Boss Keith and almost drove over 2 of the agitadors.

That day we had a lot of fun watching through the fence. One of the scabs made the mistake of trying to get aboard my pony, Lightning. That guy turned 2 more somersaults than the others, but they all was on the ground most of the time and it was better than a clown act at the circus. Just the same, some of us hated to see our best ponies in the hands of such amateurs and we got kind of sad about it. So that night we raided the ranch and each of us got our own best hoss out and a couple of extras.

Boss Keith made the next move. He went in and got a deputy sheriff who came out with lots of warrants charging us with hoss stealing. The deputy looked us over and went back to town, saying that what he needed was a Federal army.

We was getting anxious about conditions on the Terrapin and we had nothing to do, so we began to ride the fences, only riding on the outside instead of the inside as we usually did. We was right. One section of the fence was already down and a lot of cattle had strayed. We rounded up the herd and hazed them back home and then fixed the fence. On the way in that night we found some more fence down that wasn't down that morning. The wires was cut

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clean. We repaired it, and we was beginning to get suspicious.

Buck Forensee and me went out that night, jiggling along the fence line and sudden we found a man cutting the fence. He heard us coming and beat it—toward our old bunkhouse. Buck swore a blue streak.

"Them scabs," he said, "are so damn' anxious to keep their jobs they're cutting fences and blaming it on to us." All the time we was fixing the fence Buck was thinking. "Listen," he said, "you can write. You write a note to Boss Keith and we'll put it in his mail box. I ain't going to risk my rear end in his office again."

So I wrote: "Dear Boss: If we catch any more of your scabs tearing down Terrapin fences we're going to lick hell out of them. This is a warning. The gang."

For a couple of days no more fences were cut. Everything was jake except Long Slim Long was doing our cooking in the homesteader's shack and there wasn't much of it, and what there was was rotten. So we crabbed a lot and wished the strike was over and it took a lot of oratory from those agitadors to make us think we was jungle beasts of humanity again.

THEN 1 night hell bust loose. First thing, Buck and I was snooping around and we caught a guy cutting fences. We could grab him this time because he was outside the fence. Buck cuffed him around until he stopped yelling and went limp and we carried him back to the shack, intending to do a little mayhem and then deliver him to Boss Keith as an example of what his scabs was doing. Hot diggity dog! Who do you suppose was that skunk? It was 1 of our own agitadors. The 1 with the biggest mouth and most noise. We put him to bed and the other 3 agitadors spent 3 hours trying to square things with us, because we felt so rotten about 1 of our own leaders going around and cutting our fences. At last we said we thought the strike was over, but we promised we'd sleep with it and take a vote in the morning.

We had just got to sleep when Long Slim Long let out a yell, a terrible yell. "Fire!" he said. "Fire!" and we all landed in the middle of the floor. Long Slim was lighting a lantern and he couldn't get it lighted.

"The ranch house, it looks like!" he yelled. "Maybe only the tool shed."

The Terrapin boys was jamming out the front door of the shack. The agitadors didn't come and I looked back and saw that the bunk where the littlest 1 slept, the 1 we had manhandled, was empty. Maybe I thought at the time that he had run away; most likely I didn't think nothing because I was galloping over to the ranch house and Buck Forensee was breathing hard on the back of my neck and Long Slim Long was waving his lantern and yelling and we was all like a bunch of steers on a stampede.

That fire was blazing something fierce. For 20 years the ranch house had been drying out there on the desert and it was just so much tinder. Something was making it burn fiercer than tinder, too. Brightest orange light you ever saw. It almost blinded you and it lighted every creosote bush for miles around and even shone on the mountain 10 miles away.

From the bunkhouse the scabs came running and I wanted to kill them all because I knew 1 of them had started that fire to make it look like us. Just as we got to the front door Boss Keith came piling out in his night shirt, or what was left of it. It was smoking and his eyebrows and hair had been burned away and his face was red and black. He staggered some and acted like it hurt him terrible to breathe and batted at the air with his hands.

"Eloise!" he croaked. "She's upstairs. Upstairs! Alone! Eloise!"

My heart just dropped out the bottom of my boots because the place was just a sheet of flame now. I raced around the house a couple of times trying to get in a door and every time flames hit me so hard in the face they most knocked me over. The other Terrapin boys was doing the same thing and old Boss Keith had sat on the ground and was croaking, "Eloise!" She

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is all he has since Mrs. Keith died two years ago but she don't mean any more to him than she does to me and all the other boys.

THE third time around the ranch house I saw her. She was in an upstairs window and the fire was right on her. In just about 10 seconds the whole thing was going to collapse.

"Jump!" I yelled up at her. "Jump! Here she is," I yelled. "Get a ladder! Jump!" I yelled. "Jump!"

But Eloise looked down at the ground and I guess it looked a long ways away, and the fire was 'most eating her up but she didn't dare jump. She didn't look any bigger than half a minute up there and I couldn't blame her for being scared and not jumping.

The whole front of the house fell in and part of the roof. Sparks went straight up to the sky a mile high and the heat was something terrific.

"Eloise, please jump," I yelled.

But she leaned out the window and her face was white and the orange light made it seem as if her hair was on fire. The boys was scurrying everywhere looking for a ladder but there wasn't no time for ladders or anything else. Some way a big idea hit me.

"Look at me, Eloise!" I yelled. And she saw me. Maybe I looked kind of funny with only a pair of pants on and nothing else but just the same she knew me. "Watch me!" I yelled. Then I said real loud, "Mugg!" and puffed my cheeks up larger than I ever had in my life, puffed them up until I thought they was going to bust. I held up my arms toward Eloise.

All of a sudden she kind of smiled and down she came straight into my arms. "Wump," she said, hitting me on both cheeks with her little fists. I went "poof" and then fell backwards because just then the ranch house caved in.

THAT night we took Boss Keith and Eloise over to our shack. We found that little agitador and he smelled of gasoline and his car showed he had drained some of it out. So we tied him face backwards on the slowest hoss we could find and gave him a canteen of water and started him down the road. We gave the other 3 agitadors 3 minutes to get out of range.

Finally we had a meeting and disbanded the A.U.O.I.C.F.R.A.B.E.

"Strikes me," said Long Slim Long while we was disbanding, "that we are all indirectly responsible for Boss Keith losing his ranch house. Seems like we all ought to chip in 5 dollars a month to pay him for a new 1."

There was only 1 answer to that, so now we Terrapin boys are working for 25 dollars a month for the next 5 years. But we still got our 80-hour week.

THE END

## *Ripe Old Ages*

SOME people think the elephant lives to a very old age, but his limit is one hundred to one hundred and fifty years. The swift, active eagle may live one hundred years. The carp matures early and lives long—one hundred and fifty to two hundred years. Crocodiles live beyond one hundred years, but they never stop growing. The slow tortoise need be in no hurry. He may live two centuries. Two hundred years is a ripe old age for a pike. "Corcky," famous Australian parrot, reached an age of one hundred and eighteen years. The May fly lives but a day, and does not eat. The fire beetle may live thirty-seven years. The whale is a champion of longevity—its age is estimated up to five hundred years.

—*Robert H. Pollard.*

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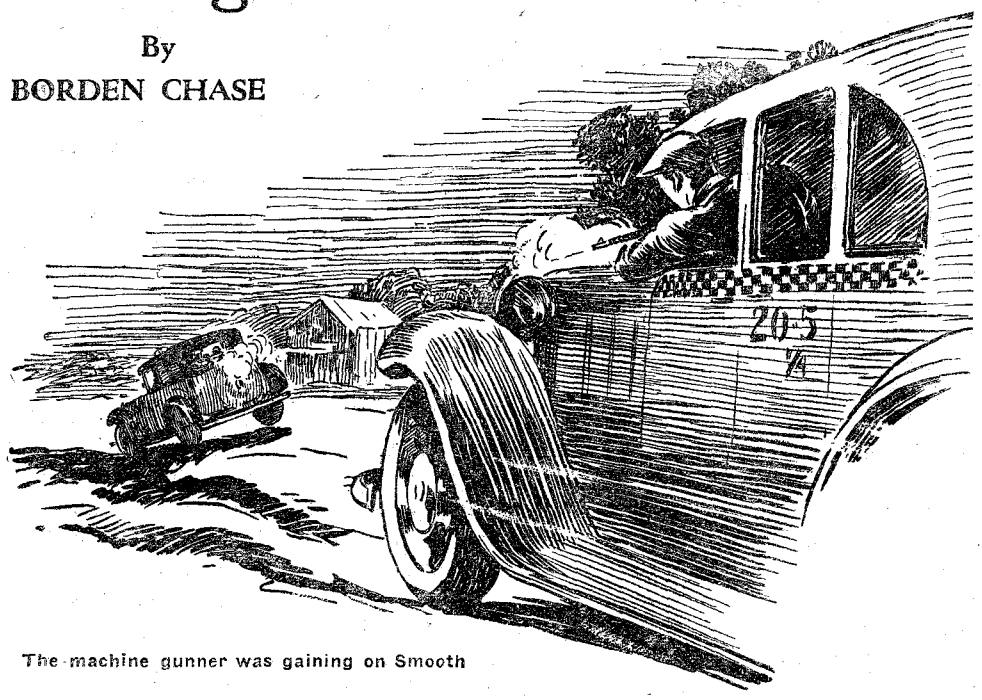
# Midnight Taxi

By
BORDEN CHASE




The machine gunner was gaining on Smooth

*Being on the inside of a dope ring is a very good way to dynamite it, Smooth Kyle finds—if you don't get blasted yourself*

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

FEDERAL OPERATIVE PETER KYLE, known among his friends as Smooth, found it natural to revert to his old trade, driving a taxi, when he started on the trail of a New York dope ring. One of his first contacts, through his cab driving, was with Bet-a-Grand Rudd, big-time gambler and small-time narcotic peddler. Rudd hoped to assume control of the New York drug traffic, and he was easily taken in when Smooth showed a desire to join his organization.

Soon Smooth was one of Rudd's trusted lieutenants, and he played a large part in blasting the gang of Rudd's chief rival, Big Spanish. Two women, both very attractive, came into Smooth's life. One was Dorothy Manning, an actress, who herself became a Federal Agent, working with Smooth; and Gilda Garland, one of Rudd's followers, who worked with Smooth in fighting the Big Spanish gang.

**This story began in the Argosy for October 12**

## CHAPTER XXI—*(Continued).*

TAKEN FOR A RIDE.

WHEN they reached the Nineties, Smooth saw the rear car swing wide and pull alongside. The man beside him cursed and started.

"Hey, Joe!" he barked suddenly. "Looka that crate out there! Who is it?"

Smooth tensed and drew a deep breath. So that car wasn't part of the job! It looked as though there might be fireworks in a minute and he set his feet firmly against the floor.



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"I don't make it!" said Joe and turned the gun slightly away from Smooth's chest. "If they don't scram quick, I'll give 'em a burst — serve 'em right, the punks!"

Lucky's foot was tight against the floor boards and the taxi was pounding the pavement, swinging from side to side and lurching over the slight rises in the road-bed. The driver of the other car flicked his wheel and crowded the cab hard against the curb. Lucky cursed! He slammed on the brakes and the cab went into a screaming slide.

SMOOTH was lifted from his seat by the sudden stop. He lashed out at the barrel of the Tommy gun, grabbed it and held tightly as a short burst of slugs ripped through the taxi floor.

The man beside him had slammed against the forward section of the cab and the gun in his hand had shattered the window.

Curses dribbled from his lips as he yanked his slashed hand free of the glass and turned the gun on Smooth.

"Hold it—rat!"

The voice was hard and it meant business. A man was standing at the cab door, a Tommy gun pointed just over Smooth's head at the man beside him. The cursing stopped and Smooth twisted, crouching to keep out of the line of fire. He took his own gun from the slashed hand above him, bent lower and backed from the cab.

He wanted to shout—laugh—give vent to his pent up emotions in words, but he compromised by swinging the barrel of his gun across the jaw of the man who had held the Tommy gun against his chest.

"Thanks for the surprise party," he said to his rescuer. "I don't make you—but thanks again."

"That's okay—glad to do it." He held the gun steadily on the men in the cab and spoke to his partner. "Take those bums, Garison. Put 'em in the back of the rig and keep an eye on 'em keep two eyes on 'em!" He drew Smooth to one side. "How about the driver—he in on this?"

"He's clean," said Smooth. "But who t'hell are you?"

"McNeary sent us. I'm Ted Wade, an old-timer in this division. The lad I just spoke to is Frank Garison and the driver is Bill Duffy—both of 'em new men here in New York. What about the car up ahead? Think we can catch him?"

"Not a chance. He's only some two-bit punk, anyway. But how did you manage to pick me up here on the Drive? McNeary said he was going to have some of you guys keep tabs on me, but I asked him not to."

Wade laughed silently and nudged Smooth in the ribs.

"When the Chief decides one of his agents needs protection, he can't seem to hear suggestions. We've been tailing you ever since you left Rudd's place. And what a merry-go-round! We saw that car pick you up outside Silva's joint and we tagged along behind. I thought you'd ducked out a side door of that apartment house when you took Miss Manning home, and we were just about to leave when you came out."

"Yeah?" grinned Smooth. "I was saying good night."

"After the joy ride along the Drive I figured that might be the case," smiled Wade. "Boy!—that would have been a laugh from a plane. I'd have spent a week's pay to see it. You leading the procession in a cab—these punks tailing you —and us right behind them. It must have looked like a funeral."

"It damn near *was* one," said Smooth. "Ask McNeary to keep those bums away from a telephone. Don't turn 'em over to the cops for a few days. And now there's one more trick you can pull for me, if you will."

"Glad to oblige. What is it?"

"Walk over to the cab with me and follow my lead. I don't want the word to spread that I'm a Fed and the hackman is all ears."

"Sure thing. But why not let us take him in too?"

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"He can do me more good on the street. Besides, he's a pal of mine."

GARISON had bundled his prisoners into the rear of the Federal Agent's car and was facing them with a gun tucked under his arm. Duffy, the driver, leaned against the wheel and Smooth noticed his eyes were steady upon Lucky Carmine. The hackman was sitting quietly in the driver's seat of the cab, his eyes staring out into the night and an expression of utter disinterest on his face. It appeared as though he were merely waiting for a rider to decide what destination he wished to go to, or as though Lucky were bored with the whole affair.

He turned when Smooth and Wade walked to the taxi door and stared at both of them blankly.

"Well, much obliged, pal," said Smooth and extended his hand to Wade. "Tell Rudd his guess was better than mine."

"Yeah, we'll tell him," said Wade. "But later!"

"Oh, don't hurry. Take those two punks for an airing before you burn them. And make a clean job of it — especially that bird who had the Tommy gun. Six in the chest and six in the skull—as a favor to me, eh?"

"It's a pleasure," grinned Wade and climbed into the car.

"Guess that takes care of everything," said Smooth to Lucky as he seated himself in the taxi. "The angels were sure close that time. But now those other mugs can sweat a little."

"That's the way it goes in the racket," agreed Lucky. "You're runnin' in luck to be workin' for a guy like Rudd. He must like you to be savin' you like that."

"He needs me. Don't kid yourself about that liking bunk. He'd dump me in a second if he didn't."

Lucky drove silently across town to Broadway and pounded south to Forty-fourth Street. He stopped at the corner and swung open the door for Smooth. Then he glanced ruefully at the meter, grunted and tossed up the flag.

"What's the clock say?" asked Smooth.

"Nuts!" growled Lucky. "That job's on the arm.* I heard you give me an okay to that bird with the Tommy gun. He was a greedy bloke, too—just achin' to have me join those other two stiffs. Thanks, Smooth—maybe I can do the same for you some day."

"Aw, that's the old bilge water," protested Smooth. "I'll bet you ain't got two pounds done all night. And there's a busted window to explain to the boss. Here!" He handed Lucky one of the bills that Rudd had given him earlier in the evening and he saw Lucky's eyes widen. "That cover it?" he asked.

"A double sawbuck! I was beginnin' to forget what one looked like. Thanks, sucker."

A COLD October drizzle had turned the streets to black glass when Smooth left McNeary's office and headed toward the garage. He lifted up his coat collar, hurried across Times Square and kept close beneath the theater marquees on his way to Ninth Avenue. The Chief had said little about the affair of the previous evening but had listened with interest to Smooth's report.

Both were agreed upon one point: The Spanish mob was just about wiped out. Their supply and distribution organizations had been disrupted and they were no longer operating as a unit. But the "brains"—the man who had built the huge drug business into a smooth running concern—was still at large.

McNeary was inclined to believe this man was not to be found amongst the gangsters. His moves had been too well thought out—too cleverly planned for a mobsman. The Chief argued that a person of this mentality would hardly allow himself to become actually associated with a crowd of gunmen. And if he were located, it would be in the president's office of some large corporation or financial in-

** On the arm means a call done without payment.*



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stitution. McNeary reminded Smooth that bank officials had supplied backing to the bootleggers during Prohibition and it was reasonable to suppose their habits had changed little with the arrival of Repeal.

Smooth could not agree. And as he threaded his way through the rain-swept streets, he again checked over his reasons. Luck had played a major part in his success to date. True, he had been ready to accept the breaks when they came his way, and he had made the most of each. But hardly had he made a move before a counter move had been started. That little party last night had been no coincidence! Someone had tipped the "brains" of the Spanish mob that Smooth was at Silva's place. Whoever had passed the word along was not seated in an office. Far from it! He must have been in close contact with the few remaining members of the mob. He was with them—one of them. And even now he might be watching and planning his next move.

Smooth shrugged and hoped for the best. There was no use worrying about it. If the breaks were with him, he'd come through—if not, all the cleverness he possessed would help little. He turned in off Ninth Avenue and started up the garage ramp. Old Squint was squatting on the concrete runway, mumbling and scratching and staring blankly out at the rain. Smooth tossed him a dime.

"Thanks, Smooth," he grunted. "There was some guys here lookin' fer you a while ago."

"Yeah? Who were they?"

"Aw, I dunno! A coupla close-mouthed lugs what wouldn't slip me a jit. I told 'em you didn't work here no more."

"Good for you, Squint. Let me know if they come back and I'll buy you a drink."

He tossed the derelict another coin and walked into the garage. McNeary had kept him talking longer than either realized and it was after four o'clock. The huge barn-like structure was empty save for one cab near the mechanic's bench and another close to the office. Smooth looked through the open door but saw no one inside but Harry Tone. Evidently his visitors had accepted Old Squint's statement and looked elsewhere.

SMOOTH realized he was asking for trouble by driving a hack in Manhattan. The Spanish crowd were out to get him and were making the rounds of the garages. Well—it was his job to clean them out and it would save time if they were both anxious for a meeting. But he hoped he would be the first to get a gun clear when the crash came.

Harry Tone looked up when he stepped into the office and the ever-present cigar again turned around and around. He looked back at the cards before him and said nothing.

"Does that mean I'm in the dog house?" grinned Smooth.

"The voice is familiar but I don't place the face," growled Tone and kept on with his figures. "Did you ever work here before?"

"Quit clowning. I been sick—the measles. Be a good guy and let me roll out one of those relics of yours. I'll probably book five pounds tonight."

"Listen, Smooth—if I wasn't stuck for a driver, I'd screw you out of this joint plenty fast. Where you been all week?"

"I told you I was sick," repeated Smooth. "How about it—do I roll?"

"Oh, all right. Take that lump that's outside, and by the way—throw your hat in before you come up the ramp in the mornin'. You had visitors today and they might come back."

"Why, Harry!" laughed Smooth. "You don't think anyone would want to hurt me, do you? I'm playin' it legit, now."

"It ain't my business to think," said Tone. "I checked back on you and the cops give you a clean bill. That lets me out. You always used to be a good kid with a decent record. If you made a mistake—that's your business, and I'll bet you paid for it, plenty. I'm givin' you a chance to make a decent livin' and the least you can do is treat me right. G'wan



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roll the shekels and keep your snoot clean. I'm busy!"

## CHAPTER XXII.

### A BAD MISTAKE.

SMOOTH took a blank card from the desk, checked the meter readings and drove down the ramp. Tone was a good sport. He was in a business that gave him little return for his investment and like other fleet owners he was constantly fighting to make both ends meet. He was forced to carry liability insurance but could in no way protect himself against the damage done to his own rolling stock. A few bad crackups would put him out of business, yet his cabs must always be spotless and mechanically perfect. Yes, it was a tough game for both owners and drivers, and Smooth realized only too well that Harry Tone was proving a good friend when he let him take out a rig.

He swung east to Sixth Avenue, doubled back to Forty-third Street and Broadway and found Tout Ender standing on the steps of a hotel. He threw the flag, opened the door for Ender and they swung north on Seventh.

"What kept you?" asked Ender irritably. "Don't you know we gotta keep a schedule?"

"Yeah, I know," said Smooth. "I was talkin' to the guy that owns this crate. He says there was a bunch of visiting firemen lookin' for me at the garage. They're probably still lookin', and if they catch up with us—wham! Want to call off the party?"

"Rudd *would* send me out with a guy that's hot," growled Ender. "Here I am, mindin' my own business and deliverin' decks of junk like a gentleman, and he slips me a driver that's practically a clay pigeon. Poisonally, I think it's the bunk. All this shootin' and stuff is gettin' me jumpy. I don't like it."

"Don't let it throw you, pal. The first hundred shots are the toughest—after that you get used to bein' a target. Now where do we go?"

Ender directed him to a small café on upper Eighth Avenue and Smooth made a note of the address. A rat-faced little sneak met them at the curb, grinned slyly at Ender and stepped into the cab. Smooth watched them in the mirror and saw Ender deliver a package of narcotics and accept payment. He stopped when Tout signalled and their passenger got out.

"Who was that creep?" asked Smooth.

"Whatja expect? A polo player?" snapped Ender. "You take what you get in this racket, and that little chiseler puts out plenty of junk, even if he is crummy lookin'. His name is Weesly—or Wowsley, or somethin' like that, and he hangs out in that joint back there. Now bounce over to Ninth."

FOR the rest of the afternoon Smooth rolled up one avenue and down another. Rudd's distributing system was a web with strands that led through every section of the city. The poorer localities each had a tight lipped runner to accept his supply from Tout Ender and pay off in cash. At times there were arguments that were always won by Ender and in some neighborhoods they had to circle the block a few times waiting for the policeman on duty to move on. Each contact was eventually made and each was silently noted down on the back of Smooth's trip card. He asked for and was told the name of the various runners and smiled to himself when he thought of the look of astonishment that would come over McNeary's face when he read this report.

It was a complete index of Rudd's New York trade, and Smooth knew the gambler had not as yet started to widen his ring. He was solidifying his position here in Manhattan, wiping out the remnants of the Spanish mob, and then, when the field was clear, he would move on. The web would spread until it touched every key city in the country and Rudd would be at the center, supplying the dope and collecting the profits.

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Yes, it was a nice little racket, thought Smooth. It was starting like dozens of other rings and when McNeary was ready to make his move, it would fold the same way. The Bureau of Narcotics was a branch of the Treasury Department seldom heard of—an old, smooth running outfit that did its work with little fuss and no publicity. The newspaper boys had missed it—ignored it completely in their excitement over the Department of Justice. And that was as the Bureau wished. Smooth remembered the first bit of advice he had received when his application had been accepted: "Keep your mouth shut and keep out of the spotlight!" It was good advice and he had profited by it. As a result, one of Rudd's men was supplying him with a complete list of jail prospects—and with evidence that would stand up in any court.

They stopped for a light supper in a white tiled lunch room and then rolled up through the Negro district. Lenox Avenue and One Hundred and Thirty-seventh Street added another name to Smooth's list and still another when they swung across to St. Nicholas Avenue. Two sleek colored youths, dressed in the exaggerated splendor of the Harlem dude, stepped from narrow hallways and hurried across the rain-swept sidewalks to the cab. Each turned over a roll of bills and received a supply of narcotics in return. There were a few words, white toothed grins, and they were gone—hustling through a dripping alley to some back-yard tenement.

"We got one more stop at Broadway and a Hundred and Twenty-fifth," said Ender. "That winds up my day and, feller—I'm glad! I got enough money in my pants to pay for a dozen knock-offs and the sooner I pass it along to Rudd the better I'll feel."

"Want me to get you a motorcycle escort?" laughed Smooth. "The coppers'd be glad to oblige."

"Feelin' funny, eh?" grunted Ender. "Well, Smart Gee, take a look over your shoulder and get a load of the rig behind us. It's been sittin' on our tail all afternoon."

"*What!* You screwy punk. You mean someone's tailin' us and you just cracked wise? Which rig is it? Show me!"

"Aw, cool off," said Ender. "I may be wrong, but it seems like that white cab is stickin' close to us. I thought I spotted it when we were on Ninth Avenue and again in Harlem. But them cabs all look alike. Yeah—maybe I'm wrong."

SMOOTH swung west on One Hundred and Forty-fifth Street, turned down the side window and leaned from the taxi. He watched a half dozen cabs hurry across the intersection and finally a white car made a left turn behind him. They were on a sharp incline leading up to Amsterdam Avenue and Smooth dropped into first speed and crawled along between the trolley tracks. He kept an eye on the mirror and noticed that the white cab seemed to have difficulty in making the grade. Two cars swung in ahead of it and Smooth twisted his wheel and spun north on Amsterdam. He stopped at the corner and waited to see if the white taxi would also make the turn.

The traffic lights changed and a sudden flurry of cars blocked his view. He rolled again and cut over to Broadway. Swinging south, he hugged the curb and within a few blocks he picked up the white cab.

"You ain't wrong, Tout," he said. "That mug's on our tail. Why t'hell didn't you chirp up before?"

"I tell ya, I wasn't sure! Ever since I been in this junk racket I been seein' a million guys follerin' me. Cripes! It's givin' me the heebie-jeebies. Fer a dime I'd tell Rudd to go to hell and quit. The profits are swell, but when I think of doin' a bit in Atlanta—"

"Yaller, eh?" said Smooth. "You punks are all alike. You get a crack at big money and it throws you. When you're in the clear you see a regiment of coppers behind you. And when something real is on your neck, you go blind on me. Now get this! At the next traffic light, hop out and scram into a doorway. Grab a good look at that bloke behind us—spot him right—

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get his number! I'll loop the block and pick you up again. Get it?"

"Aw, t'hell with him. I don't feel like playin' hide an' seek in the rain. Besides, I'm heavy with dough—too heavy to be wanderin' around loose in the dark."

Smooth stopped for a traffic light and swung to face Ender. His lips were thin and his right hand was toying with his tie. He stared at the runner and jerked his head toward the cab door.

"Out, bum! Do as I tell you or I'll scatter your ribs all over the floor. Scram! I'm givin' the orders around here!"

Tout Ender cursed slowly and steadily but he opened the door and ran toward an apartment entrance that fronted on Broadway. The rain had increased to a steady drive and the lights of the store fronts were dull yellow loops that extended part way across the sidewalk. The wet swish of automobile wheels filled the air with a steady, sibilant whine. Pedestrians hurried from a near-by subway exit and ran to shelter in the nearest stores, waiting for the downpour to subside. A wind whipped in from the Hudson, howled through the narrow canyons leading up from the river and swept twisting torrents of rain before it.

SMOOTH rolled down a sharply inclined street leading to the Drive, drove north for two blocks and doubled back onto Broadway. He wondered if Tout had been correct in thinking that white cab had been following them. It might have been coincidence. A sudden thought brought a grin to his lips. Suppose McNeary had kept a few men on his tail? He had agreed to call them off when Smooth said it would make him conspicuous. But the Chief was a peculiar sort of a chap. It was hard to guess what he really had in his mind and that square jawed face told no secrets.

If there really were two men from the Bureau of Narcotics in that cab, Smooth would certainly have the laugh on his boss when Tout reported to him with a complete description. On the other hand, if they were two members of the almost extinct Spanish mob, a word to Rudd would send a dozen killers out after them. Smooth realized that McNeary would hardly approve of a move of that description. But this was a killer's racket, and Smooth intended to take advantage of any help he could get.

He drove slowly along Broadway toward the apartment into which Tout Ender had run. When he reached the corner, he noticed a crowd milling about the entrance in spite of the pouring rain. A radio car splashed to the curb and an officer elbowed his way past the crowd and hurried into the hall. Smooth drove past the entrance, parked his cab and mingled with the people in the street.

"What's up?" he asked an excited storekeeper at the edge of the crowd.

"A keelink! I look from de front from mine store and—blowie! A shot goes off! I run out—I look wid astonishment, und as I liff und breed, it comes anodder shot. Blowie! Such a business is dis. Two guys mit refolfers desh oudt—dey desh to a keb and phoff! Dey is gone! Dat dees could happen on Brotway—yiiiii!"

"You mean a guy was just killed in there?" barked Smooth.

"Saay! What's de metter? You don' talk Eengleesh? Soitintel—of coss he is keelt!"

For a moment Smooth stood motionless. He had tried an old hackman's trick when he sent Tout into that hallway. It was the best possible way of checking on a following car and one not likely to be caught by the average gangster. He was sure the traffic had covered Tout's exit from the taxi—that the white cab would follow him around the block while Ender looked from the hallway and spotted the trailers. But the men behind had outsmarted him. He realized it must have been the hack driver; the passengers could not possibly have spotted Tout. And that meant he was fighting another taxi driver—a man who knew as many tricks as did he.

He squirmed his way through the ex-

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cited throng and walked into the hall. Another group blocked the entrance but Smooth got past them and stood behind an officer who was leaning over all that was left of Tout Ender. The killing had been the work of a professional—two shots, one in the stomach and the other squarely between the eyes. Tout was finished.

"Wadda you want, Nosey?" barked the officer. "G'wan—get outta here!"

"Yeah—I'm goin'," said Smooth.

His eyes were on the other officer who was methodically searching through Tout's pockets. A gun, a few small bills, the usual assortment of papers and envelopes—and a single paper of narcotics; the killers had left a perfect setup to send the police running in circles. Smooth saw the officer look at the cocaine and grin. He held the paper toward his partner and grinned.

"Aw, just another junkie—a small time rodman that ran with the wrong mob," he said. "There's about twenty bucks on him, so it wasn't robbery. Better give the house a ring and tell 'em to send down a homicide man."

SMOOTH edged back through the crowd. And as he walked to his cab he realized that mistakes cost plenty in this game. Tout Ender had been carrying not less than ten thousand dollars when he stepped into that hallway—a nice little take for the sorely pressed Spanish crowd. Tout had lost the ten thousand and had lost his life along with it, not through any fault of his own—simply because Smooth had made a mistake. But for the breaks of the game, it might have been Smooth lying crumpled in that hallway.

He shrugged, drove south to Times Square, and parked his cab in Forty-fourth Street. He entered a small hotel in the middle of the block, hurried to a phone booth and called Rudd. While he was waiting for the connection, he silently rehearsed the lie he must pass along to the gambler, and he smiled grimly when Rudd's suave voice came over the wire.

"Smooth talkin'," he said quietly. "Tout's through—a washout. They got him cold a few minutes ago."

"Yeah? Let's have it."

"We stopped at a Hundred and Thirty-sixth and Broadway to make a delivery. No one showed up and Tout scrammed into an apartment to look for the guy. He was—"

"*Where was that?*" barked Rudd.

"Hundred and Thirty-sixth," repeated Smooth. "You'll read it in the late editions."

"The rat! He must have been pullin' a phony—that spot wasn't on his route. Well—go on!"

"I pulled to the corner and waited. I heard the music back there—two quick ones—but I stayed put. The place was hot—there was a thousand peasants scramblin' for a look and I mixed in. The cops figure it a regular knock-off because there was a few bucks in his pockets."

"A few bucks! That's a laugh," said Rudd. "Did they get much stuff?"

"Only a few decks—we were just about finished. So now what do I do?"

"Come up here in about an hour. I want you to take me to Brooklyn. G'by!"

Smooth dropped the receiver on the hook and leaned back against the wall of the phone booth. He lit a cigarette, thought for a moment and then called McNeary at his hotel. There was no answer and he then tried him at his office.

"Working late, eh, Chief?" he said when McNeary's "Hello" sounded in the receiver. "Get a report on that job at a Hundred and Thirty-sixth?"

"Yes. Tout Ender, wasn't it?"

"Right. And I was driving. I got a perfect route list for you and if you'll send a man to meet me, I'll pass it along."

"Nice work, Smooth. But who pulled that job?"

"Yeah—who killed Cock Robin—how would I know? Big Spanish must have a few boys left on the streets and they need money. Well, they got a chunk tonight."

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"Does Rudd know about it?"

"Sure. I just told him. He wants to see me later but I'm not sure what's up. Wish me luck."

"You seem to have plenty. Meet Ted Wade at Forty-second and Sixth in a half hour and give him that list before your luck runs out. I need it."

"That's a pleasant thought," laughed Smooth, and he flipped the receiver onto the hook.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### INVADING BROOKLYN.

HE drove to a Forty-second Street cafeteria regularly frequented by hackmen, ordered coffee and rolls and seated himself at an empty table in the rear of the restaurant. It was a little after ten—lunch time for the night drivers, and the place was crowded with them. He saw Lucky Carmine at another table near the rear wall and waved a roll at him. Lucky nodded, walked to the counter and ordered the inevitable second cup of coffee, and seated himself beside Smooth.

"Watcha got done?" he asked, and twisted his face into a knowing grin. "You oughta be rollin' plenty in the rain."

"Oh, I can't kick," said Smooth. "I'm close to two pounds. Not bad, eh?"

"Quit stallin'," laughed Lucky. "All the hackin' you been doin' you could stick in your eye and never find it. You got a grand racket, pal—I wish Theresa would let me grab a few quick dollars. But she's a straight little broad and everything's gotta be strictly on the level to suit her. But that's the way it goes when you go overboard for a dame, eh?"

"She's smart, Lucky," said Smooth seriously. "This may sound goopy comin' from me, but take my advice and play it Theresa's way. Fast money ain't the kind that sticks in your pocket. And between the two of you, you must have a nice little sock put away toward that farm. When d'you expect to go rural?"

"Well—things ain't so good just now. Theresa lost out when the Trocado folded and she didn't hook up with a job yet. As for me—you know what I can grab. Maybe twenty plunks a week, tops."

"I didn't know the Trocado closed. How come?"

"With Spanish in jail, things didn't go so good and the backers wrapped the joint up. I understand he was backin' that show the Manning girl was in, and that's foldin' up, too. Didn't she tell you?"

"Not yet—I don't think she knows. But I'll ask her about it later."

"You goin' to meet her after the show?"

"I don't think so," said Smooth. "I gotta do a job over to Brooklyn in a few minutes."

"Where abouts?"

Smooth grinned and shrugged his shoulders. He hadn't meant to tell Lucky that. He had learned long ago that it was safer to keep his mouth shut about his movements. But it had slipped out. He stood up, stretched indolently and turned up his coat collar.

"Well, I gotta go out in the dewdrops and shove the crate around. Say hello to Theresa for me and tell her I'll be up for meat balls and spaghetti one of these nights."

"Good enough, Smooth. I'll do that little thing. And Theresa can sure cook a mean dish of macaroni. I'll be seein' ya."

SMOOTH drove east on Forty-second Street and when he reached Sixth Avenue, Ted Wade stepped to the curb and hailed him. Smooth opened the cab door, threw the flag, and continued on toward Fifth Avenue.

"You're just the kind of a guy," said Wade, "who would drag me out in a rainstorm. What's on your mind?"

Smooth handed him his trip card, on the back of which was noted the name and address of each of Rudd's runners. Wade glanced at it and whistled. He folded the card, put it in his pocket and reached forward to pat Smooth on the shoulder.

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"What a clean-up!" he said. "Keep it up like this, Smooth, and you'll be District Supervisor within a year."

"Thanks, Ted, but I wouldn't want McNeary's job for all the pennies in the Treasury. It's always easier to take orders than to give them. Now, where can I let you out?"

"Oh, just drop me at Grand Central. I understand you're on your way to Rudd's place."

Smooth swung in to the curb at Vanderbilt Avenue, tossed up the flag and opened the cab door.

"Thirty cents, mister," he grinned. "And us hackmen usually gets a dime tip in the rain."

Wade laughed and spun him a half dollar, turned and disappeared in the crowd. Smooth rolled north on Lexington, swung east, and left his cab before Rudd's apartment. Simpson answered the door and escorted him to the library.

"Mr. Rudd's been expecting you," he said.

"Well, here I am, wet and dripping."

"Yeah, here you are," said Rudd from behind the Queen Anne desk. "Sit down, grab a drink, and tell me the misery. Gilda's coming up in a few moments—I was foolish enough to let her know I expected you and she insists upon meeting her former husband. All right with you?"

"Sure—if Dorothy isn't comin' too."

"I'm afraid Dorothy has deserted me, now that you're in town again. But I don't hold it against her." Rudd laughed and ran a hand through his graying hair. "We can't stay young forever, can we, Smooth?" The smile left his face and his eyes were like small round pebbles as he looked at Smooth. "Tell me about Tout!"

THE story that Smooth told was the same in substance as he had reported over the phone. He insisted that Tout's death would in no way be connected with Rudd's narcotic outfit and seemed puzzled as to why Ender had made the stop at One Hundred and Thirty-sixth Street.

"That's not hard to guess," said Rudd. "Tout wasn't used to big money and I guess ten G's was too much for him. He probably spotted a few of his pals in the hallway and expected to get away with a phony stickup. Then he'd come back here and bellyache about being robbed. But the gag back-fired and his pals decided to get rid of one cut. Served him right."

"Don't you figure it might have been Spanish?" asked Smooth.

"Spanish? The Feds have got that guy and just about all his mob sewed up tight. Oh, I'll admit they missed the brains, but whoever the wise guy is, he's been left holding the bag with no money and damn few men. There's no doubt but what he'll try to get organized again, but when he makes a move I'll spot him."

"Maybe this is the first move," protested Smooth. "Ten thousand dollars isn't exactly chicken feed."

"I've thought of that, but it doesn't stand up. If a car had followed you, caught you up an alley and pulled a stickup, that would have been different. But when you tell me that Tout insisted upon stopping at One Hundred and Thirty-sixth Street, where he had no right to stop, it simply means he expected to meet someone. Don't you see, Smooth, it couldn't possibly be Spanish's mob."

Rudd's reasoning was sound, and Smooth wondered if he had not made a mistake in the weaving of his story. The newspapers would undoubtedly mention the fact that the killers had used a taxicab to make their getaway. Of course he could deny his and explain to Rudd that it was probably a distorted version handed out by an excited shopkeeper. There was just a chance that someone might have taken the license number of the taxi and Smooth knew that it would be a stolen car, picked up purposely for the job. Later, it would be found abandoned on the streets, and if a report of this was made by the newspapers, Rudd would certainly become suspicious.

There was nothing else Smooth could do. He couldn't tell Rudd the truth and

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admit it had been his mistake—that he had sent Tout Ender to his death. Rudd was not the type of man to overlook an error that had cost him ten thousand dollars. And, to date, his faith in Smooth had apparently been wholly justified. Why change things?

"Well," said Smooth, "it won't do any good to sit here and weep about it. What's on for tonight?"

"Take your time," said Rudd. "First, do you think you could break a new man on Ender's route?"

"Sure I can. Tomorrow if you want."

"Good for you. I'll send Yitz Cohen around with you tomorrow afternoon. We'll see him tonight—remind me of it."

SIMPSON announced Miss Garland and Rudd smiled and lifted an eyebrow toward Smooth. He nodded to the butler and then leaned back in his chair.

"Hello, darlings," said Gilda. "What a break on a rainy night—a nice apartment, good liquor and good company. What more could the little girl ask?"

"Hello, Gilda," said Smooth. "Don't you know enough to stay in out of the rain?"

"Rain makes the flowers beautiful," she laughed. "So t' hell with it—let it rain on me. It might have the same effect."

"Sorry, honey," said Rudd. "The beauty parlor seems to have taken care of that. Drink your little drinkee, say hello to Smooth and find a good book. We're going out on business."

"Be nice, Rudd. How do you expect me to romance the lad if you're going to drag him out in a blizzard? Won't the business wait?"

"Not a chance," said Rudd. "We've been wishing for this rainstorm."

"Oh, I get it," said Gilda wisely. "The boats, eh? And that reminds me, you've been promising me a look at that yacht. When do I see it?"

"In a few days," said Rudd. "I'll let Smooth take you for a moonlight ride."

"Not if I know it!" protested Smooth. "She was hard to handle in an airplane but she'll probably be worse on a yacht."

GILDA reached up and caught him by the ear lobes. She stared into his eyes and grinned. Smooth was standing beside the desk and when he tried to back away from Gilda he almost upset the decanter. He caught her by the wrists and forced her hands to her sides. Rudd laughed and extended a hand to steady the glasses.

"If you two want to wrestle," he said, "I'll try to get you a match at the Garden. Behave yourself, Gilda—suppose Dorothy caught you pinching Smooth's ear. Think she'd like it?"

"Not as much as Smooth does. But all jokes aside—wouldn't you like to have me come along with you tonight?"

"I'm sorry, Gilda," said Rudd. "We won't have time to look at the stars this evening. But the weather reports promise a clear sky for tomorrow night. Will that be okay with you?"

"That's a bet."

"All right, I'll call Dorothy and ask her to come along too. Or maybe *you'd* rather do that, Smooth?"

It was obvious to Smooth that Rudd was playing one girl against the other. McNeary had been right in his estimate of the man. This gambler was quick to take advantage of any human weakness and turn it to his advantage. By pitting the girls against each other he would make allies of both. Each would keep an eye on the other and be only too ready to report any irregularities to Rudd. It was a clever move and Smooth tossed a mental bow to the gambler.

"Yes, I'll ask her to come along, if you want me to," he said. "What's it going to be—a party?"

"It *would* have been," said Gilda coldly. "But now it will probably be a free-for-all."

Then she turned to Rudd and frowned. "Just what has this Manning girl got that makes her so popular?"

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"Smooth might help you out there," laughed Rudd. "Why not ask him?"

"You can both go and take a running jump in the lake," said Smooth. "Leave me out of this."

"Aaah! He's weakening," smiled Gilda. "One more trip to the coast and he'll be shopping for a wedding ring. Wouldn't you, Handsome?"

Rudd rang for the butler and Simpson brought him a gabardine topcoat and dark felt hat. He put them on and waited while Smooth slipped into his overcoat and finished his drink. Gilda ran a thumb along the rows of books in a near-by case and lifted it to her nose when Rudd suggested a book of Indian love lyrics. She held out her hand to Smooth and when he grasped it, she leaned forward and kissed him lightly on the lips.

"That's for luck," she said. "Be careful, lover—I'd hate to lose you—even to a brunette."

They hurried to the elevator and Rudd was grinning broadly as they crossed the foyer and stepped out into the rain. He seated himself in the back of Smooth's cab, turned down the front window and lit a cigarette.

"Know anything about Brooklyn?" he asked. "The Bay—for instance?"

"A little. I used to hack there. Where do we go?"

"Yitz Cohen is waiting for us at the end of Emmons Avenue. The Nicotine was to bring in a load from the Roulette tonight, and I want to see how the boys are working. But don't hurry—we're early."

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### TAXI RACE.

THEY rolled down Fourth Avenue, over the Manhattan Bridge and out Ocean Parkway. The rain had settled down to a constant drizzle and the roads were empty canyons that glistened with the yellow rays of the street lamps. Occasional hurrying figures darted across at the intersections, and splashing taxis spun past them with their homeward bound loads of theater-goers. Smooth settled comfortably in his seat and kicked the car along at a steady rate that would eat up the ten-mile trip in a little over a half hour. There was a chill in the air, and he kept both forward windows closed.

"Is that a sure date for tomorrow night?" he asked when they had cleared the traffic and were rolling along the outer stretches of the Parkway.

"Yes, we might as well have the girls out for a little party. It'll do us all a lot of good—take the curse off. It hasn't been a picnic getting this organization started, and we both need a little relaxation. Besides, I want you to see the Roulette and get a line on her. If you're going to be as much help to me as I expect, I want you to know all the angles."

"That suits me. The more I learn, the more I'm worth. But I'm not anxious to run south on the Roulette—one trip across the line was plenty."

Rudd laughed. He seemed to derive a great deal of amusement from the mistake that Spanish had made when he sent Smooth to the coast. It was one of the little vanities common to most smart-money men that they enjoyed the other fellow's mistakes and exploded away their own. In Rudd's estimation, Big Spanish had acted like a sucker and had deserved the double cross that had been handed him. He said as much, and Smooth agreed with him definitely.

"But there's one thing I don't get," Smooth said. "Why do you always use cabs? In your spot, I'd travel in a nice bullet-proof sedan with glass an inch thick. It's safer than a hack."

"Don't kid yourself," snapped Rudd. "A private car puts you on the spot—makes a target of you. Within a week every mug in town would have it spotted. But a taxi is just a taxi—there's thousands of 'em on the streets, and I might be in any one. And as for that bullet-proof guff—nuts! Show me a piece of glass that a Tommy gun wouldn't make a sucker of.

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Those babies could eat their way through it in one burst. T' hell with it."

They drove along the old waterfront that edged Sheepshead Bay, and Rudd directed him to a group of bungalows near the end of the street.

There was a police booth near by, and Smooth pointed to it and looked inquiringly at Rudd.

"So what?" said the gambler, and grinned. "We're not expecting a truckload of whisky. Our stuff comes in a suitcase—a small one at that. I'm no hog. I learned my lesson when the Cigarette was sunk. There was quite a bit of stuff on that boat—too much to lose. So now I make Hoegy Bright send in a little at a time. It's slower, but it costs less when a knock-off comes."

"That's smart," agreed Smooth. "And by the way—what did you do about the Cigarette? Any idea who took her?"

"I'm not sure, although I think it was that wise guy who's running Spanish's mob. He was stuck for junk—had to get some in a hurry to keep what little trade he's got left. Some fool in my outfit talked too much and tipped him off to the boat racket. But that's just a guess."

"Think he'll try it again?"

"I hope he does," said Rudd quietly. "And I hope he's in the boat when it happens. The boys have some high powered artillery on the Nicotine—enough to put up a swell scrap with a battleship. And they're aching to try it out."

"Won't that be fun," laughed Smooth thinly. He glanced through the side window and saw a man watching them from the porch of an empty bungalow. "Is that Cohen, over there?"

"Yeah, that's him," said Rudd, and tapped lightly on the glass.

COHEN splashed through the puddles, crossed the road and seated himself in the rear of the cab. He was drenched, but seemed not to mind the rain at all. He winked to Smooth, stamped his feet against the floor boards and asked Rudd for a cigarette. When it was lighted, he jerked a thumb toward the police booth and grinned.

"Mr. Cooper wanted to know why I was hangin' around in the rain. I told him I was expecting a couple of saps who wanted to go fishin'. How about it? Wanna fish?"

"We're a little early to catch anything," laughed Rudd. "And Smooth forgot the bait. We'll roll down the avenue and maybe Flatfoot will feel the urge for a cup of coffee. I don't want him stickin' his beak in when the Nicotine hits the dock."

"Good idea, boss," agreed Cohen. "That guy just came on duty at midnight and along about twelve-thirty he's goin' to get sick of countin' raindrops. This joint is a morgue."

Smooth stepped on the starter and swung the wheel. They cruised slowly along Emmons Avenue and doubled back through Voorhees. Rudd glanced at his watch occasionally and at length nodded when he caught Smooth's eyes in the mirror. They turned back along the waterfront and as Cohen had predicted, the officer had left the booth when they arrived.

They left the cab and walked along a narrow boardwalk that led out to a small dock. The night air was colder when it swept in off the ocean and the rain whipped against their faces like hail. A heavy sea thundered around the lip of Oriental Point, but spent itself in the open water. Back in the dip of the bay the waves were small and choppy. They lapped against the dock and sent up a damp odor of seaweed and marshgrass. An occasional squeak sounded from a protesting dock timber, and at times a door slammed in one of the empty bungalows at the water's edge.

Rudd and Cohen had turned their backs to the drive of the rain, but Smooth leaned into it and studied the black expanse of water before him. Suddenly he heard the steady throb of a boat's motor. It grew in volume and a dark shape loomed out of the spray.

A sleek lined boat lifted high as she swung into a wide circle and headed to-

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ward the dock. Smooth saw a man studying the group through a pair of night glasses and Cohen turned and lifted one arm. The motor was cut and the boat slid quietly to the dock.

Chick Binder and Bert Lovette stepped out onto the stringpiece and waved a salute to Rudd. Smooth recognized them, despite the fact that they were grotesque figures in their oilskin coats and southwesters. Their faces were raw from the lash of the wind and rain, and they proceeded to curse the off-shore trade in thorough and explicit language. Binder handed Cohen a small suitcase and then pointed to the boat.

"ANY of you gents like to go for a little spin?" he asked.

"Nuts to you, feller," laughed Smooth. "I'll stick to my hack. There ain't so much southern exposure there as you get in a wave hopper."

"We'll be out tomorrow night," said Rudd. "No business—it looks as though we're going to have a clear night."

"That's what you think," growled Lovette. "Me—I expect this rain to last forever. And cripes—it's cold stuff."

"Aw, stop weeping," barked Rudd. "Augie and Little Tommy are a damn sight colder on the bottom of the Atlantic Ocean. Or maybe they're hotter, where they are now—who knows?"

"You're tellin' us?" said Binder. "We're the ones who found the Cigarette just before she sank. Those boys had enough lead in them to keep them down forever. Hell! They were a mess. Whoever did that job is one sweet gunner. He ripped a slash along the waterline with one long burst, then swung back and sprinkled slugs all over hell. Augie was just a smear—ugh! Little Tommy was damn near cut in half and he seemed to be noddin' at me when the Cigarette stuck her tail in the air and dove."

"All right, all right!" snapped Rudd. "I know it's tough, but what t' hell you think I'm payin' you boys heavy money for? A ballet dance? Forget it! And if that same bird shows up again, do a little chopping yourselves."

"It'll be a pleasure," growled Lovette. "A positive pleasure to see how much lead that lug can hold without leakin'."

"That's okay with me," said the gambler. "Now you guys chase back to the Roulette and tell Bright to dress the scow up nice for tomorrow night. We're going to have ladies aboard, and I want things neat. Make a trip in tomorrow and pick up some wine." He handed Binder a few bills. "This ought to cover it. Now scram."

The Nicotine lifted on her step and roared off into the night, and Rudd started up the dock. Yitz Cohen followed him closely, carrying the suitcase, and Smooth walked beside him. They noticed that the police booth was still empty as they picked their way through the wet street to the cab. Cohen set the bag on the floor, got in behind Rudd and closed the door. Smooth stepped on the starter, swung the wheel and was about to drive along Emmons Avenue when he noticed a cab standing a few hundred feet further along the road.

"Any of the boys following us?" he asked Rudd.

"What do you mean—following us? Of course not. Why?"

"I thought you might've told some of them to tail us in another rig and keep an eye on us. But if you didn't—get ready for a party."

"What t' hell's eatin' you?" asked Cohen.

"See that cab over there? Well, it don't make sense! All these bungalows are empty this time of the year. And even if one copper fell for that hokum about a fishing party—I don't! What would a cab be doin' here this time of night?"

"Anyone in it?" snapped Rudd.

"I think so. Looks as though a guy was pikin' us off through the back window—I can't be sure. The motor's running; I can see the exhaust. And the way he's heading, he's on the wrong side of the street. So what does it add up to?"

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"It adds up to one dead chump!" said Yitz Cohen quietly. "You guys sit tight while I bounce across the road and feed a clipful of hot ones into that dope's chest."

HE lifted an automatic from a shoulder holster, leaned forward and opened the cab door. He had put one foot on the running board when Rudd grabbed his arm.

"Sit down—fool!" snapped the gambler. "Use your head! That mug isn't squatting in the back of that cab with a rod—not a chance! It's a thousand to one shot that he's got a chopper lined on us right now. Swell break you'd have against that!"

"Think so?" asked Cohen nervously.

"Why not?" said Smooth. "He's got us bottled up in a dead end street—he let us get into the cab so there'd be no chance of us scattering—he's sitting pretty, waiting for us to try to pass him. Then comes the blast. Sure, he's got a chopper."

Rudd's lips were tight. He leaned forward and stared intently at the other cab. Smooth glanced back and was surprised to see a half smile on the gambler's face, and he noticed that those white hands were still—resting lightly against the window. At least Rudd had guts. When his number went up he didn't snivel and whimper like Cohen was now doing. The thin-faced gunman was snapping his head from one side to another, casting about like a cornered fox for a way out. His eyes were constantly in movement and his fingers were twisting and doubling against the palms of his hands.

Smooth looked at his own hands. They were tight on the wheel, and he wondered if they would tremble if he released his grip. He fumbled through his pockets for a cigarette and match. Bending below the windshield so the flare of the match would not make a perfect target, he lit the butt and dragged a deep breath of smoke into his lungs. He heard Rudd's mirthless chuckle and turned to face him.

"Grabbin' a last one, eh, Smooth?" smiled the gambler.

"Looks like it," he answered. "I'm tryin' to guess a way out, but no dice, so far. The best I can offer is a quick break. I'll duck out the front, you take one door and let Cohen try the other. If we scatter, there's a chance he won't nail all of us—but what a lousy chance!"

"Nix!" squealed Cohen. "I ain't goin' to try to outrun a slug—not me. I'm sittin' tight—somethin' might happen."

"You're damn right something's going to happen," grinned Rudd. "That bird is going to get sick of waiting, and he's going to drop a burst into this rig. If he don't, he's dumb."

"See you in hell, Rudd," said Smooth, and twisted the door handle.

He slid one foot through the partly opened door and was about to lunge forward when he saw a dark shape splashing toward them through the downpour of rain. He jerked back, grinned, and turned to face the men in the rear of the cab.

"Hold it, you guys!" he snapped. "I think we get a break." He pointed to the lumbering form in the darkness. "See that?" he asked.

"Yeah," said Rudd. "But I don't make it. What is it?"

"A bus. There's a bus line here that operates from the subway station, and this is the end of the line. The driver'll make a turn here and start back. If that lug with the chopper holds off for just a minute, we may grab a pass."

THEY were silent. Each man crouched low in the cab and their eyes held steadily to the huge bus as it wallowed through the puddles toward them. It passed the cab on the far side of the street, swung into a wide turn and stopped. Smooth saw the bus driver lean back in his seat and stretch. There were no passengers, and the driver dipped into the crown of his uniform hat and took out a partly consumed cigarette.

The bright lights in the interior of the coach made of it a stage upon which a single actor performed. All unknown to him, he was watched by the most intent

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audience ever assembled. Three men crouched in one cab, their eyes steady upon the bus driver, and each repeated endlessly, "Roll, fool! Roll!" as though to hurry the driver by mental persuasion. In another cab a cold-eyed killer crouched above a sub-machine gun and waited for the bus to clear his line of fire.

The driver finished his butt. He opened the door slightly and flipped it into the rain, stretched again and examined his face in the mirror. He felt his chin stubble with the back of his hand, and rubbed his eyes. Each movement brought a curse from Cohen or a chuckle from Rudd. Smooth stepped down on the clutch, slipped into second speed and touched the gas throttle lightly. The driver yawned, blew his nose lustily, glanced at the meter readings and rolled.

Smooth let in the clutch and sent his cab alongside of the bus. As the huge coach gathered speed, Smooth ripped into high and kicked at the gas. He jockeyed forward, crowding between the bus and the curb, and almost crashed when the driver swung right to avoid a bump in the road. They were past the other cab now, and Smooth fed gas hard. He swung out in front of the bus, careful to keep it as a screen from the other cab, and raced down Emmons Avenue.

He glanced in the mirror. Rudd and Cohen were kneeling on the rear seat, their eyes to the window, and each held an automatic ready at hand.

"How's it look?" Smooth asked.

"Step on it, kid!" barked Rudd. "You got company! That bird is comin' like the hammers of hell!"

"Knock out the back window and try for his tires! All he needs is one crack at us with that chopper."

"Great idea," said Cohen. He swung his gun, and the crash of breaking glass followed the movement.

There were three quick shots and Smooth heard Rudd cursing. Smooth twisted sharply to the left to avoid an obstruction in the street that was the result of a road repair job. Another shot flatted against the night air and Cohen yelped.

"Lug!" barked Rudd. "Watch that gun. You damn near ripped my ear off."

"You don't need to knock out a tooth, do you?" howled Cohen. "I slipped."

"Hang on, customers!" shouted Smooth. "We're goin' around a curve!"

He heaved at the wheel, slammed down on the brake and went into a half spin that carried the cab into Haring Street. It was a dark alley leading from the waterfront to the back roads, lined on either side with small bungalows and low-roofed wooden houses. The street lights were widely spaced, and the road was paved with an uneven macadam surface. He swerved past a treacherous looking puddle, fought the wheel and fed gas.

FROM the distance he heard a stutter of shots and instinctively he ducked. The front tires bounded high over a hidden ridge and the wheel spun from his hands. Another rattle of fire drowned out a closer sound that hummed past the cab like a swarm of hornets. Smooth grabbed the wheel, heard the front right fender fold against a street light and saw a running board curl around the pole like a cruller.

"Ride 'im, cowboy!" laughed Rudd as he bounced against the roof.

"Know any good prayers?" yelled Smooth. "That fender's binding on the wheel. When it burns through the rubber we stand on our ear."

"Why bring that up?" yelped Cohen. "Just get this load on smooth ground fer a second and I'll spot that bum at the wheel. Yooow!"

Another burst ripped from the following cab and Cohen dove at the floor boards. Smooth was using all the strength in his arms to overcome the drag of the wheel. He braced himself, swung along Voorhees Avenue and then turned into a narrow road that led through the marshes. It was part of an old real estate development that had long since been abandoned to the weather. The pavement was good in spots, but at intervals there were

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stretches of uneven ground that sent the cab into a waddling dance.

It took skillful driving to pound along through that stretch of back road, and Smooth realized he was up against a driver equally skillful as himself when he failed to gain an appreciable lead on the cab behind. He doubted that an ordinary gangster could have made the grade—there was a possibility that one of the mob who had once handled a booze truck might have done it. But when another hum of steel jacketed hornets proved that the following gunner was coming into closer range, Smooth was willing to bet the few remaining moments left to him that the driver was a hackman.

"If you guys don't nail that driver before we hit a good road," he cried, "the party's over. There's a smooth stretch just ahead—try hard!"

"Whatta you think we're doin'?" howled Cohen. "Snipin' at ducks, or somethin'? I ain't no rodeo rider, and it's as easy shootin' from the back of this crate as it would be jugglin' a feather on a basket of snakes."

"Stop snappin' your mouth and give that gun a chance!" barked Rudd. "You're supposed to be a gunner—well, gun, damn it!"

Cohen emptied the few shells left in his clip and Smooth knew he had missed when he saw the steady approach of a pair of headlights in his mirror. Rudd made his last play and hurled his empty gun through the back window in a final gesture of defeat. Smooth's hands were locked around the wheel and he dared not release them to reach for his gun. He shouted to Cohen, and the little gunman reached across Smooth's chest and lifted his automatic.

Another blast from the sub-machine gun hurried Cohen's aim, and he emptied the clip in desperation at the oncoming cab.

"Washout!" said Rudd. "This bum shoots like I swim—lousy! It's up to you, Smooth. Any out for us?"

"A Chinaman's chance!" snapped Smooth. "Rip out the back seat and slide it through the rear window. When I yell, drop it and hope like hell that it don't bounce."

He heard them pulling at the cushion and a low curse from Cohen when his wrist ripped over a pointed piece of glass in the window sill.

"Yeah—that's a great idea," yelled Cohen. "But it won't work—we can't get the seat through the window—won't fit!"

"Shove it out the door window, dummy! Pass it around to Rudd—hurry!"

A DEPRESSION in the road a few feet distant had formed a wide-spreading puddle, and as the front wheels spewed the water aside in twin black cascades, Smooth slowed.

"Drop it!" he yelled.

He heard the splash as the seat landed, and had his fingers not been clamped tightly about the wheel he would have crossed them for luck. A moment later Rudd's cry blended with a howl from Yitz Cohen. Then there came the sound of screaming rubber and a crash.

"*It got 'im!*" cried Cohen. "He clipped it and piled up! Look at the bum—he's doin' a barrel roll and a nose dive—wow!"

"Grand thinking, Smooth!" said Rudd. "That was one for the book. How'd you guess it?"

"Think I shoved a hack for a livin' without learning to keep alive?" grinned Smooth. "That was a gift — from one hackman to another."

"How come?" asked Rudd.

"No one but a hackman would've shoved that rig along behind us the way that bird did. Wanna go back and sort out the pieces?"

"Like hell, I do! The gunner *might* be alive, and he *might* be cuddling that chopper. No, thanks! We'll keep rolling. Get us over to civilization where we can grab another cab. We'll drop this load in a back street and scram home."

"No good!" protested Smooth. "You grab another cab, but I gotta roll this

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clunk into the garage. It belongs to a friend of mine, and he needs it. And before you go, slip me a few dollars to pay for the seat and glass."

"Once a hackman, always a hackman," laughed Rudd, and handed Smooth some folded bills. "Okay, drive it in and give me a ring on the phone tomorrow."

Smooth stopped at an intersecting avenue, hailed a passing taxi, and watched Rudd and Cohen climb in and shut the door. Cohen held the suitcase across his knees, patted it lightly and threw a kiss to Smooth.

"'Night, sweetheart," he laughed. "Thanks for the buggy ride."

"Chirpy little bird, ain't he?" said Rudd, and put the palm of his hand against Cohen's chin and pushed. "But he hummed a different lullaby when the music was hot."

Smooth grinned, saluted gravely, and turned to look at the taxi. He found a light stick of timber on the road and pried the fender away from the wheel. The rubber was badly worn, but it looked as though it might carry him to the garage. He climbed in behind the wheel, headed for Ocean Parkway, and settled down for a half hour drive.

## CHAPTER XXV.

### DOUBLE CROSS.

ALTHOUGH it was well into the morning when Smooth drove up the garage ramp, his was the first cab in. The washers were playing rummy with the night man, and they looked up in surprise when Smooth came into the office and stamped the rain from his shoes.

"Sunny weather driver?" asked one.

"Oh, I'm not hungry*," laughed Smooth. "I got mine, and I'm leavin' some for the other feller."

He scribbled his name across a blank trip card, folded four twenty-dollar bills in it and fastened them together with a clip.

"Here," he said to the night man. "Give this to Harry and tell him, 'Thanks for everything.' The rig needs a new rear window and seat—the front fender's got a wrinkle in it, and the tire's chewing-gum. Outside of that—she's ready to roll. Have fun, fellers, and good-*night*."

A chorus of emphatic curses followed Smooth to the office door. The night mechanic was looking ruefully at the battered fender and swinging an open-end wrench thoughtfully in one hand. He looked hard at the bridge of Smooth's nose and seemed to be measuring the distance, but his eyes widened when Smooth tossed him a five-dollar bill and pointed to the group in the office.

"Whack it up amongst you," said Smooth. "A gift from Cinderella to the big bad wolves."

He chuckled happily as he walked down the ramp and headed toward Forty-second Street. Checking over his day's work, he decided he was due for a pat on the back from McNeary. And he hoped Dorothy would be on hand in the morning when he made his report. It was getting near the time when McNeary would be able to crack down and wrap up the case. There was a chance that he would rate a promotion if the Chief was pleased with his work, and he had definite ideas as to what he intended to do with the additional pay.

His nerves were still jumping, and now that the excitement of the chase had worn off he was chilled to the bone. He decided against a cab ride to his hotel and a hot shower, and turned into the hackmen's favorite cafeteria on Forty-second Street. A few drivers were huddled about the tables, totaling their calls and filling in imaginary trips to take the place of those which had been omitted during the rush hours. Smooth recognized none of the men, and when he had ordered his coffee and buns, he went to an empty table at the rear of the restaurant.

The hot Java made his soaking clothes a little more bearable, and soon chased

*Hungry—A driver greedy for work and money.

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the chill from his system. He dawdled over a second cup, smoked a cigarette, and tried to see Dorothy's face in the smoke that curled from the butt. He had partly succeeded when another face intruded. He drowned the cigarette, looked again and saw Lucky Carmine, sodden and mud-stained, standing at the counter and reaching for a cup of coffee.

When the hackman turned and saw Smooth, he grinned and started toward him. The light from a wall bracket threw his face into sharp relief against his upturned coat collar. And Smooth saw that Lucky's cheek carried a strip of adhesive tape that ran from temple to chin. There was an ugly bruise beneath his eye, and his coat sleeve was ripped at the elbow. When he walked he limped slightly, and Smooth noticed he was having difficulty holding the plate and cup.

SUDDEN doubt sent Smooth's hand to his shoulder holster. It closed about the empty leather and he remembered that Yitz Cohen had not returned his gun. Lucky caught the movement, and for an instant it seemed to Smooth that he hesitated. Then a broad grin creased his features and he limped to the table.

"I know I look like a bad dream," he smiled. "But that shouldn't send you reaching, feller. Why the quick grab?"

"Where'd you collect the bruises?" snapped Smooth.

"In a crack-up," answered Lucky easily, and seated himself opposite Smooth. "Why? Does that make me hot?"

A definite suspicion was crystallizing in Smooth's mind. Earlier in the night Lucky had asked him where he was going. And when he had mentioned Brooklyn, the little hackman had again questioned him. Remembrance of other coincidences came to life in an instant. That talk of Spanish's at the Trocado—Spanish apparently asking Lucky for instructions—the cab that had followed him earlier in the day and resulted in the death of Tout Ender—the stickup on the Drive! All these things seemed to revolve about Lucky Carmine! In some way he had been connected with each.

"A crack-up, eh?" he said slowly. "Where'd it happen?"

He did not withdraw his hand from beneath his coat and he noticed that Lucky's eyes were held steadily upon it, and that he was careful to keep his own hands in plain view on the table. He knew Smooth packed a gun, but he did not know it was not in its holster tonight. It was the one ace Smooth held, and he had to make it stand up. If Lucky was what he now thought him to be one of Big Spanish's gunmen—it was going to be tight going for the next few moments.

"Aw, I was loopin' it down the Concourse," said Lucky, "and a balkie* dope spins out of a side street. I went into a skid tryin' to miss him and wrapped up the wagon. Nice, eh?"

"The Concourse? Sure it wasn't in Brooklyn?"

"Look at the sheet," said Lucky, and passed his trip card to Smooth. "There's only one soldier† on it—the rip that took me to the Bronx. Naw—I ain't been in Brooklyn tonight."

Smooth pushed the card back to Lucky and grinned.

"Nuts with the card," he said. "I don't read fairy stories this year. And I'm tryin' like hell to believe you, Lucky. I *want* to believe you—see? I like you. But there's an awful sour smell about this setup. A guy gunned me in Brooklyn tonight and I had a tough job duckin' him. Had to spin him in a ditch to get clear. And that bird was one sweet driver—a hackman, or I'm crazy. Could it be you?"

Lucky lifted the cup to his lips and blew into the steaming coffee. Smooth saw there was not a tremble—that his wrist was steady. And the grin never left Lucky's lips when he sipped the hot Java.

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*Balkie—Unskilled driver.

†Soldier—A call for more than a dollar—*i.e.*, the figure 1.



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"Behave, Smooth," he said. "Why should I wanta burn you? I'm legit—you know that. Don't get yourself all jumpy over a few bursts and start suspectin' your pals. I'm your friend, feller."

Smooth knew it was a lie as the words left Lucky's lips. The little hackman had tripped up on one word—*bursts!* Smooth had made no mention of sub-machine guns—he had simply said he had been shot at. In the jargon of the mobs, pistol fire was never referred to as "bursts." That was the term reserved for a Browning or Thompson gun. And Lucky had used the wrong word.

FOR a moment Smooth said nothing. The coffee had soured in his stomach, and he was cold. He was used to the double cross—expected it in his dealings with the mobs. But Lucky and he had spent many hours over the coffee cups in the old days, discussing their troubles and telling the endless tales of the hackmen. They had worked out of the same garage many times, and once had thought of buying a cab and working it on shares. It had been a peculiar friendship — one confined to their working hours, save for an occasional trip to the Polo Grounds or the Yankee Stadium. But Smooth had always counted Lucky as a friend, or at least as a pal who could be depended upon to come through when the going got tough.

Now they were enemies. And for the past three days Lucky had been tracking him down — systematically trying to kill him. Less than two hours ago this same hackman had slashed through the wet streets, hunting him, eager for the kill. And even now, as he smiled across his coffee, he was probably waiting to follow Smooth into the street and finish the job.

Smooth checked back over the facts. The evidence that linked Lucky to Spanish's mob was purely circumstantial, and Smooth had learned through his years of training in the Bureau of Narcotics that it was one thing to make an arrest and quite another to get a conviction. It seemed that the courts delighted in making it difficult for this particular branch of the Treasury Department to function. They demanded ironclad proof of guilt, and innumerable times had released prisoners who were, as McNeary put it, "Guilty as hell and twice as hot."

There was no doubt in Smooth's mind as to Lucky's ability to clear himself in court as matters stood at present. And Smooth was somewhat surprised to find that he was glad this was so. Lucky was clever enough not to put up a fight if Smooth showed his credentials and attempted to arrest him. But McNeary was having trouble enough keeping the rest of Spanish's mob bottled up until the Bureau was ready to close the trap. Obviously, the thing to do was to stay in his rôle of gunman for Rudd and let Lucky slide out. He leaned across the table and stared into the little hackman's eyes.

"QUIT stallin', pal," he said quietly. "You and I are workin' for different bosses. You're not kiddin' me any with that stuff about the Concourse. I know the street and the spot where you went into your waltz, and I'm the guy that spun you. Right?"

"Smart feller," grinned Lucky. "So what do we do? You're sittin' pretty with your hand on your roscoe—why talk?"

"Maybe I don't want to kill you," stalled Smooth.

"Maybe you're smart," added Lucky. "Listen, pal, I figure you're fast with that cannon—but no matter how good you are, I expect to get in *just one slug*. And I'm goin' to try to make it count—see?"

"Would you think I was yaller if I called it a draw?" asked Smooth.

"Hell, no! I'd know you were smart—and I might tell you to scram out of town for the good of your health. Things are goin' to happen in this burg—big things, pal."

"Thanks for nothing," said Smooth quietly. "Now take a receipt. It's a smart mob that knows when it's licked. And the Spanish outfit is through — for keeps. Pull out, Lucky—get in the clear



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while you can. If that guff about the farm wasn't the old hoopla, buy it tomorrow and spend the rest of the winter milkin' cows. Theresa will look swell in a sunbonnet—much better than she would in black. Give her my best, and don't buy any wooden ducks."

He kicked back his chair, backed around the edge of the table and walked to the cashier's counter near the door. He did not hurry, and his eyes were upon Lucky every moment of the time. It required a little manipulation to get some change from his right coat pocket with his left hand, but Smooth managed it, and did not take his right hand away from the empty holster. It was his only out—a bluff that must be played through. For he knew that Lucky Carmine was a killer—and hot.

Once outside the cafeteria he ran quickly along Forty-second Street until he found a hackman who was just pulling away from the curb. He opened the door of the taxi, jumped inside and crouched down on the seat.

"A short one, feller," he said. "Just drive over to Forty-fourth near the Claridge."

The driver grunted, threw the flag and bumped across the car tracks. Smooth glanced from the rear window, saw that he was not being followed, and drew his first easy breath since the time he had met Lucky in the restaurant.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### WELL LAID PLANS.

SMOOTH phoned McNeary before eight o'clock in the morning and caught him at his hotel. The Chief agreed to wait for him, and Smooth dressed quickly, smoked an extra cigarette as a substitute for breakfast, and hurried to McNeary's suite.

Some of the worry seemed to have left the Chief's face, and he smiled happily when Smooth dropped into an easy chair and hooked his legs over the arm.

"That was a nice job you did yesterday, Kyle," he said. "A real pleasant surprise after a week of headaches. Anything else on your mind?"

Smooth told him briefly of the events of the previous evening, and McNeary damned the mobsmen thoroughly when he heard of the attempted killing. He listened to Smooth's explanation about Lucky and made a note of the name. Then he paced restlessly about the room until Smooth had finished.

"You have an unhappy faculty for getting into trouble," he said at length. "I suppose you know without me telling you what your next job is to be."

"I could guess," grinned Smooth. "But I'd rather hear your setup."

"Very well, here it is. We can't wait any longer to present our case against Big Spanish and the men of his mob. Those that aren't decorating a slab in the morgue are sure of a long vacation in Atlanta or Alcatraz when we go to trial. Your evidence is a very necessary link, and I want you to dictate a complete report to a stenographer in a few minutes. I'll have it witnessed and notarized—just in case."

"Yeah, in case I'm not around when the trial comes up, eh? And that sounds as though Mrs. Kyle's little boy is going to get bounced right into a mess of trouble—quick."

"You've asked for it," said McNeary wearily. "You wanted to play this your way, and you seem to be the only man who can approach Rudd. He's the big catch now. I'll admit we've missed out on the brains of the Spanish outfit, but I don't think we'll catch up with that gentleman any sooner by stringing along with Rudd. Your friend the gambler seems to be as much at sea as our outfit. So we'll let that angle wait and crack down on Rudd."

"How do we stand on evidence?" asked Smooth.

"Almost enough to clean house completely. We've located his source of supply, and that list you turned in takes care

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of the distribution organization. We want the gang on the Roulette and the Nicotine. And that's your next job."

"I thought so," laughed Smooth. "Just a pleasant little evening's work."

"Oh, I know it's not going to be easy. But you might be interested to know I've put through a recommendation for promotion for a fresh faced kid in my district. If he cinches this case for me, I don't think the Bureau will have the heart to disapprove of it."

"Thanks, Chief," said Smooth earnestly. "But it would be worth losing it if I could stay in your district."

"Yeah—well, just wait until you make a mistake and then we'll see if you sing that tune. And now, what about tonight?"

"Rudd's throwing a little party on the Roulette with me as the guest of honor. He wants Dorothy to come, too, but that's out."

"I'm not so sure about that," said McNeary thoughtfully. He turned to the phone and put through a call.

Smooth started to protest when he heard the number, but McNeary waved him aside.

"That you, Dorothy?" he said into the instrument. "Good morning, young lady . . . I'd like to see you for a few moments . . . Yes, he's here . . . All right, we'll wait." He put down the receiver and turned to Smooth. "She'll be right up. I want her to hear this."

"I can't see where she fits in tonight," protested Smooth. "If we crack down on that outfit there's going to be fireworks. Why mix her up in it?"

THE Chief smiled and fingered a menu that was stuck in the corner of the desk blotter. He glanced at Smooth and pointed to the card.

"Had your breakfast?" he asked.

"Oh, t' hell with it. I'm not hungry. You killed my appetite when you dealt Dorothy into this mess."

McNeary studied him quietly, turned to the phone and ordered a meal to be served in the room. He paced restlessly for a few moments and then seated himself opposite Smooth again.

"Let's figure things out," he suggested. "You've told me the Roulette was anchored somewhere off Montauk Point. That's rather indefinite—she might be anywhere within a radius of a few hundred square miles. Not much chance for us to find her, is there?"

"Why not? I'm going out to her tonight, and I'll pass the approximate location along to you."

"How?" snapped McNeary.

"By radio—she's got a sending outfit."

"And just how do you expect to get away with that?"

"I don't know," admitted Smooth. "It's a gamble—but I'll put it across somehow or other."

"Yes—with Dorothy to help you. That girl is smart as a whip. Between the two of you, I expect to clean this case up tonight. You can't possibly do it alone, and there's no one else who could get on the Roulette. Be sensible—give Dorothy credit for at least as much sense as you have. She'll know what to do, and she'll know how to keep out of trouble. And that seems to be more than you can manage."

"But how about the fireworks?"

"There won't be any until after you leave the boat. If Rudd plans this as a little party, he's probably given orders to the Roulette to move into Long Island Sound. Her usual position must naturally be outside the twelve mile limit beyond Montauk Point. Think it over, Smooth. If your party drove out to the Point it would take hours of riding to get there—it's well over a hundred miles. No—she's not out there."

"Oh, I agree with you on that," said Smooth. "Hoegy Bright will run her down the Sound a way—probably to a spot near Port Washington. The boys will pick us up in the Nicotine, run us out to the Roulette, and drop us somewhere along the North Shore after the party. But how does that fit in with your plans?"

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"When you learn her approximate position, I expect Dorothy to keep the party amused while you slip through a radio call to me. It's a thousand to one shot, but if it doesn't click, we can copper our bets later. Break away from the crowd—tell 'em you're sick, or anything—and get to a phone as soon as the Nicotine puts you ashore."

The waiter arrived with the breakfast, and Smooth busied himself with the food for a few moments before he answered McNeary's suggestion. In substance, McNeary's ideas matched his own, but he had not intended to include Dorothy in the plan. He was forced to agree that it would be a good deal easier to put it across if he had the help of a partner. But it worried him to think of Dorothy on the Roulette.

THEY were still discussing the many angles of the plan when she arrived. She smiled at sight of the breakfast table and helped herself to what coffee was left in the pot.

"Such hours!" she laughed. "I don't think I'd have been quite so anxious for this job if I'd known it would get me up in the middle of the night." She looked sharply at Smooth and frowned. "You look as though you'd been pulled through a wringer," she said. "Don't you ever get any sleep?"

"Not much," admitted Smooth ruefully, and pointed to McNeary. "The old slave driver is swinging the lash hard this morning."

McNeary laughed and sketched out the plan to Dorothy while Smooth leaned back in his chair and smoked a cigarette. When the Chief explained the part Dorothy was to play, Smooth noticed that her eyes widened with pleasure. She was eager as a child, and her utter disregard of the danger involved sent a chill through Smooth that made his stomach contract. He knew she would play this through as though it were a game. And for an instant there came to his mind a picture of Tout Ender, crumpled in a hallway with a red smear covering his face. He heard the whine of those steel-winged hornets that had flown past his head in Sheepshead Bay, and he remembered Chick Binder's description of Little Tommy in the Cigarette—"cut in half and noddin' at us."

"No dice, Chief!" he said suddenly. "I don't want Dorothy to make the trip. I won't have it, I tell you! *She's out!*"

"Take it easy, Smooth," said the Chief quietly. "Dorothy is an agent in the Bureau of Narcotics—and so are you. I'm the District Supervisor, and I give the orders — understand? I say she goes and that settles it."

"Oh, don't be such a baby, Smooth!" smiled Dorothy. "You know very well the Chief won't let me get hurt. And you know you couldn't possibly get into the radio room without someone to help you. Don't be selfish and try to grab all the glory. I *want* to go." She walked to the window and stared out into the morning sky for an instant. "And besides," she said quietly, "I want to be with you if anything—"

"That's it!" interrupted Smooth. *"If! —if!—if!* There's always an if in this racket. But by God, I'll burn down Rudd and his whole mob if anything goes screwy tonight."

McNeary nodded and spread a map upon the desk. He marked off a dozen spots along the North Shore, and next to each he wrote a number.

He motioned to Smooth and pointed to each spot in turn.

"Make a list of these towns along the coast and the number against each of them. It depends upon how much time you have in the radio room as to what you can send. If you're in a hurry, just rap out the number nearest to the anchorage and we'll try to locate the Roulette. We'll wait until your party leaves and then take her before Bright runs up the coast and outside the twelve mile limit. If you have time, be more explicit—send: Five miles north of number 12, or whatever the case may be. Get it?"

"I understand," said Smooth. "Where will your contact point be?"

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"We'll hook up with the police at Northport. It's a central location, and we'll sit close to the radio until we hear from you. If you have to use the phone, call this number." He passed Smooth a slip of paper. "Anything you don't understand?"

"Only one thing," said Smooth. "Why can't we leave Dorothy out of it?"

"Because, darling," she smiled, "neither the Chief nor I trust you with that fuzzy headed blonde. You might be counting stars or watching ripples over the bow and forget you were working for the Bureau."

McNeary laughed at the expression that came to Smooth's face and he tapped the point of his pencil against the list of runners that comprised Rudd's distributing system.

"How about these birds?" he asked. "Shall we make a day of it?"

"Might as well," said Smooth. "If this is the blow-off, we've got to work fast and careful. I'm taking Cohen with me this afternoon to break him in on the route. Any ideas on how you want to work the job?"

"If you follow the same routine as you did yesterday I don't think we'll have any trouble. I'll detail men to cover all the stops, and when Cohen makes his delivery we'll pick up the runners. We'll be damn sure none of them gets to a phone to pass the word along, and Rudd won't realize his outfit is wrapped up until he meets them in court."

"Good enough. But don't touch Cohen. He'll probably go back to Rudd's place with me and we can get him later," said Smooth.

"Naturally," agreed McNeary. "Well, I guess that takes care of everything. What time do you start?"

"Four o'clock from Forty-third and Broadway."

"And when do I meet you?" asked Dorothy.

"I'll pick you up at the theater at showbreak," said Smooth. "And if you're not there I won't be sorry. That's one standup I could take with pleasure."

"I'll be there!" she promised.

"You're just the type," he snapped, and rubbed his cigarette out against an ash tray. "And if you two don't mind, I'm going back to my room and catch up with a little shut-eye."

TO BE CONCLUDED NEXT WEEK

## *Alaskan Monuments*

OUT of the snow rise two posts. One is topped with a teakettle upside down, the other with a bucket. On the posts are hung saucepans, frying pans, griddles, tin cups. Tin plates are nailed on. At the bottom is a giant washtub. A few yards away are three more posts. Stuck in the top of one is a brace and bit. A telescope rests atop another, a stew-pot on a third. Stretched between posts are a rifle, a shotgun, an ax, two paddles, harpoons, a big timber saw. This is a monument to a woodsman who is buried under the snow. The first is a woman's tombstone. Such markers are still usual among western Alaskan Eskimos and the decorations are the entire wealth of the dead. One elegant memorial has been found decorated with four hundred dollars' worth of implements.

These include sleds and boats as well as boxes of spear points, tools, trinkets. One monument is topped with a fancy cuckoo clock. A hunter's grave bore the shoulder blades of three whales, the skulls of nine polar bears.

—*J. W. Holden.*

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# The Last Hunt

By JOHN RANDOLPH PHILLIPS

*A killer, they called Tod Carter's pet fox hound, which meant he must die—but not before he got a chance to prove his innocence*

HE had a feeling when he got up that morning that something was wrong, one of those uneasy sensations which strike without warning. He went swiftly downstairs, but everything seemed all right down there. He stepped out into the back yard. A red Virginia sun was just pushing its way up out of the hills to the east, scattering the mist veils before it. Tod's lanky legs carried him rapidly to the stables. Nothing, however, was amiss there; the horses dozed, rousing themselves to whinny only at his approach.

Tod went over to the kennels. The nine lean foxhounds inside the wire inclosure greeted him with joyful yelps. Nothing wrong here, either. Before the kennel gate, on the outside, drowsed a giant black-and-white Walker hound. This was Jonah, oldest and best of Tod Carter's crack pack of foxhounds. The other hounds Tod kept kenneled; Jonah, being a privileged character, he let have the run of the place.

One swift glance told Tod that Jonah had been somewhere on business of his own the night before; the dog's legs and

Tod's rifle came up as the hound skimmed the fence



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flanks were wet, one paw displayed a faint laceration. With an awful feeling that here at last he had found the trouble he feared, Tod dropped to his knees beside the hound. Suppose Jonah had injured himself on a wire fence or run a stob into his vitals! Anything that happened to Jonah would be in the nature of a major calamity.

Jonah's soft eyes smiled in greeting. Not for him the juvenile yelps of the other hounds. For him only a long, deep look of affection and trust and one caress with his pink tongue upon Tod's hand. And Jonah was all right! Except for the mark on that one paw, not a scratch marred his splendid body. With a gusty sigh of relief Tod rose to his feet.

They looked at each other, the tall, blue-eyed, broad-shouldered young man and the huge, spotted old hound. Inside the kennel the other hounds yelped jealously. Jonah cast one look of disdain at them, then returned his gaze to Tod. Tod grinned down at him. There was only one Jonah. The other dogs were good, probably the equals of any foxhounds in the State, and he loved them, but after all there was only one Jonah. What a wealth of gravity and intelligence about that old hound! And what incomparable dignity!

The sound of an automobile brought Tod back to earth. A flivver had parked in the barnyard road and three men got out and came walking purposefully toward Tod Carter. The almost invisible muscles around Tod's mouth tightened. He knew his visitors. Oh, yes, he knew them! The Barretts, father and sons. Tod waited for them, leaning one hand against the kennel fence.

OLD LIGE BARRETT came first, a short, barrel-shaped man with jumping little eyes. Just behind him, walking abreast, were his sons, Cam and Riley, young men of twenty-four and twenty-one, respectively, taller than their father but with the same nervous eyes and liberal torsos.

"We come with bad news, Tod," said Lige. His sons nodded emphatically, their eyes darting back and forth. Lige went on: "That Jonah dog of yourn kilt three of my best sheep this mornin'."

"You're a liar," Tod said, without expression.

The two young Barretts stiffened. But Lige restrained them with his uplifted hand. "Hard words won't get us nowhere, Tod," he said rapidly. "I seen that dog, Cam seen him, Riley seen him. I woke up jest 'fore day and heerd the sheep a-bleatin' and their bells a-ringin'. I grabbed my shotgun and we all three run for the back pasture. It was jest light enough to see when we got there. He already had three of them down and he was after the fourth. When—when he seen us he run. But he passed close enough for all of us to recognize him plain."

"It's a wonder you didn't shoot him."

"Hell, I tried to, all right. But the gun snapped. Snapped on both shells. 'Fore I could get in two fresh ones he was too far to shoot."

Tod looked down at Jonah. When he spoke, his voice came with a ring in it. "That dog there never bothered a sheep in his life. I've seen him go all in and out among them and never even sniff."

"There's a first time for everything," said Riley Barrett.

"Tod, I swear it was him," Lige said. "I know we ain't been exactly friends, but I wouldn't lay it on your dog if I didn't know it was so. I'd swear it on a stack of Bibles high as that poplar."

"Look at him," Cam said. "Look at his legs and sides. See how wet they are!"

"It's easy to see he's been out runnin'," Riley put in.

"You've seen sheep-killing dogs before, Lige," Tod snapped. "You know there's one test you can make. If he killed your sheep, it's ten to one there'll still be strands of wool, 'specially in his back teeth." He dropped to his knee, opened the dog's mouth, then asked triumphantly: "Any of you see any wool in this dog's teeth? See any blood on his lips?"

"That ain't a sure test," Lige said quietly. "You know that, Tod. Wool don't *always* stick in their teeth."

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Tod rose slowly to his feet. None of them would ever know how crippled he was then. Old Lige was right. Wool didn't always stick in a dog's teeth. The fact that there was none in Jonah's was good evidence—but it wasn't perfect. And there, written all over Jonah, was proof that he had been out the night before. Perhaps on a casual ramble, perhaps on business of love, perhaps running a fox—but not a farmer in the country would believe he'd been anywhere except after Lige Barrett's sheep.

"I reckon you've sent for the sheriff?" Tod said at last.

"We've sent for him. Ought to be here in a couple of hours."

WELL, through the foxhunter's code, the Barretts had him. A man surrenders his hound to execution even when there is only circumstantial evidence against him in connection with sheep killing. That is the foxhunter's code. The man who violates it loses all standing, for after all, sheep are more important than foxes and dogs.

And so the Barretts were to triumph over him at last. Two or three neighboring farmers would be selected to assess the damage, the State would pay that damage, and a cold-blooded sheriff or his deputy would send a bullet through the skull of the greatest fox dog that ever stood on four legs.

Tod lifted his hand. He could do nothing now but surrender. The code pointed that out. Even though he knew Jonah would never touch a sheep, the evidence was all against him. For just a moment Tod had a wild impulse to take old Jonah and run for it, to shoot his way out if necessary. But the impulse passed. He couldn't do that. He thought: "I've always lived by that code and seen to it that other hunters did the same. By God, I can't do otherwise when the case comes home to me."

He waved his lifted hand now. "Get out," he said. "Get off this place. You've done your duty now. I'll do mine when the time comes. But get out of my sight now."

The Barretts departed. Tod gazed after them. The trouble between the Carters and the Barretts had started a dozen years before on a frosty morning when Tod's father had given Lige a "cussin'-out" for shooting a fox his pack had treed. Old man Carter was dead now, but the enmity had been carried over to Tod. He recalled suddenly that day two years ago in town when Cam Barrett had called him a liar. With his bare fists that day he had nearly killed Cam Barrett.

But such a petty thing as enmity between two families faded in the shadow of the awful fact that Jonah was to be executed, that Jonah was never to see the sweet light of another day. He turned to the dog and his voice came huskily.

"I ain't thinking for a minute, Jonah, that you did it. We—you and me—we're just up against something we ain't big enough to buck."

He wanted to drop down and put his arms around the old dog's neck, but he couldn't trust himself to do that. Why, he'd be blubbering like a baby in a second's time. So he started for the house at a rapid walk. And suddenly he knew something, knew that never again would he ride to hounds. He was through. When they took Jonah they took Tod Carter forever from foxhunting. He loved those other hounds, knew the virtues and the foibles of every one, loved them as only a natural-born dog man can; but when Jonah passed on, he was through with foxes and dogs.

Suddenly he whirled and was off at a run for the barn. There'd be one last hunt. The Tod Carter pack would run one last time. "If I ain't here when the sheriff comes, he can just wait." Yes, one last hunt, with old Jonah leading the pack in his valedictory, singing his glorious song of the chase as the curtain went down.

TOD saddled the mare Tippet; she was a splendid blood-bay and the fastest horse in the county. He rode to the kennels and liberated the hounds.

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As they trotted in well-trained way behind him, he said: "We're 'bout an hour late, dogs, but we can spot any old fox an hour."

For a mile he rode straight, then cast in the hounds at the edge of a broom-sedge field. They went away like arrows in their first exuberance; old Jonah cruising the edge of the field and the pines. There were Judy and Nell and Tuck and Sailor; Flo and Rowdy, Captain Kidd and Mick and Little Joe, the Trigg. Good hounds, every one of them.

Tod thought: "We're going to have one last hunt. I won't let myself think about Jonah. Hi-yah dogs, go to it!"

Sailor gave tongue doubtfully along the creek bottom on the far side of the field. "You, Sailor," Tod snorted, "that fox passed there last month some time."

He heard the dogs in the brush along the creek, settling down to their business now, getting ready to make it hot for any fox whose trail they crossed. He saw Judy, lithe and long, outstripping the other dogs. Judy had always been a little too rapid, but, Lord, the way she killed a red fox when once he was up!

This morning, however, he was hoping that they would start the veteran gray who frequented this section. Nearly always you struck that old reprobate somewhere in the vicinity of this field. Down yonder along the creek the mist eddied in and out among the trees. A hound barked, then another. Tod rode forward shouting encouragement. A few desultory barks replied, then everything was still again. Tod wondered why Jonah, cold as the trail seemed to be, didn't get in there and work that fox out.

He rode slowly to the creek, let the mare drink, then crossed into the brush beyond. The dog Mick trotted past him and Tod said some stern things to him about lagging. On the ridge above Captain Kidd sounded as if finally the trail was going to work out and he would assume complete charge. "That old fool always did give too much mouth," Tod muttered. "He can't even think about a fox without bawling his head off."

Guiding Tippet to the top of the ridge, he paused to listen. The hounds had swung back toward the creek. Everything was still where Tod sat. A squirrel wanted to know, in scolding, querulous barks, the reason for his presence here. Far down the creek he saw a wild turkey skim through the treetops, and congratulated himself that his dogs had never fooled after turkeys. Shining full in his face, through the eddying mist, the morning sun was a great red beacon, giving promise of glorious sport yet to come.

The hounds were trailing desultorily down the creek. He shouted once or twice. Then all sound died out again. Tod sat and fidgeted. It was as if his pack had been swallowed up. He couldn't hear a sound, and he was about to decide that after all the trail had been too cold when there floated back to his ears a ringing message, a message that never failed to stir him to the roots of his heart.

IT was the long, mellow, full-toned cry of Jonah, Jonah who always got his fox. He sat there trembling in the saddle, waiting, waiting. And it came again, more powerful this time, fuller, more confident, serving notice upon the fox that the best fox dog in the State was on his trail. No mistake about it now. Jonah was right.

With a wild yell, the yell that only a foxhunter can give, Tod sent Tippet forward at a gallop. His voice rang and rang in the misty woods: "Ha-a-rk, dogs, ha-a-rk! Ha-a-a-a-rk!"

And they answered. Down the creek pounded the rest of the pack, harking to Jonah. Tod heard them falling in behind him, but always Jonah's voice sounded out above the rest. Ah, it took Jonah to strike. Best strike dog that ever put his nose to a cold track. And he could carry a trail once he worked it out, and when the fox was started—well, Jonah always came into his own then.

Tod rode hard through the brush, then out of the brush into high timber, where he swung left. Presently he reached a lofty hill, an open, grassy plateau surrounded on three sides by oaks, hickories, and maples,

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on the other side by tall pines. Here he reined in Tippet and listened intently.

It was the old gray, he decided, with a smile. That old veteran always took that run down the creek, then across toward the Wilmer place, as he was now doing. Presently he would swing back parallel to the creek but about half a mile from it. In fact he would cross this hill somewhere.

Tod cocked his ear. His experience told him that the fox was still a long way ahead of the dogs, probably just loafing along after the manner of his kind. Tod sat very still, quieting the mare every time she fidgeted. The hounds were closer now. Tod's eyes went searching over every foot of that open ground. It was along here that the gray so often lost the dogs.

Suddenly he saw the fox, a long, skimming gray shadow, break into the open fifty yards ahead of him. Tod held his breath. With one forefoot uplifted, the fox paused to listen. He sat down. He licked his paws, cocking his head one last time toward the baying in the distance. Then he sprang daintily to the fallen trunk of a big pine. This tree had been uprooted by wind but was not entirely down, its upper half having lodged in the crotch of another pine. The fox ran nimbly up the slanting trunk, reached the crotch of the other tree, and halted. Here he was about twenty feet from the ground and a good fifty feet from the butt of the tree.

At this moment the first hound, the fleet Judy, broke into the clearing. Half a length back came Jonah. Behind them pounded the rest of the pack, their music ringing loud and clear. Tod switched his eyes back to the fallen pine. The fox balanced himself gracefully, then sprang high and far into the air, to land a full twenty feet from the tree. He turned, then, and ran back the way he had come, doubling, paralleling his former course.

"You smart old devil!" Tod ejaculated.

THE hounds came pounding up. Abruptly, except for frantic yelps of despair, the baying ceased. The dogs milled about. Tod knew that it would be the work of but a moment to set them right, but he resolved suddenly not to do it. This was old Jonah's last hunt. Let him be the one to solve the mystery.

He did, however, get down from his horse and call encouragement. "Hunt for him, dogs. Hunt for him, Jonah, hunt for him, boy." The other hounds still milled about uncertainly. But Jonah, the cool, began to swing in circles, in ever-widening circles. Jonah, the cool and the deadly. The rest of the pack swarmed about through the brush. Good as they were, they were still not invulnerable to the craftiness of a wise old fox.

Tod waited and waited. Now and again he glimpsed Jonah, but the old dog was making no progress. Some of the younger hounds got in his way and he dodged neatly around them, but still he achieved nothing. Tod had a moment of awful apprehension. Was Jonah's last chase to turn into a fizzle?

And then Jonah spoke. Tod shouted loud and long. The rest of the pack fell in and once more the chase was on, thanks to Jonah, who now led his mates in a wild flight toward the creek bottom. That was a chase Tod never forgot. The old fox seemed now to realize that he was in for a run. He lost no time in trying to put as much distance as possible between himself and the hounds.

Down White Rock Creek he sped, a long, lithe shadow of gray, his limber, powerful legs working rhythmically, his tail like a plume, like a gallant flag. A mile below the clearing he doubled away from the creek and swung wide toward the jungle of honeysuckle, brambles, and scrub pines on the Dillon place.

Reaching this sanctuary, he twisted and doubled for the best part of an hour, confident that no dog under the sun could dislodge him from this labyrinth. Here was his second best haven; his best lay a mile and a half north. But there was no use in traveling that extra distance when he could tie the dogs into knots right here.

He reckoned, however, without an old dog named Jonah. Jonah got him out of there. Jonah was hot that morning. He

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untangled the threads of the trail as fast as the fox tangled them, and finally he made it so warm in that thicket that the fox went away from there, headed now for Sanctuary No. 1, a ten-acre patch of Scotch broom where he could twist and turn to his heart's content. Many a time in that Scotch broom he had squatted on his haunches, only a short way ahead of the dogs, and laughed at their futile and feeble attempts to unravel a trail that was not meant to be unraveled.

Tod, galloping toward the scrub-pine thicket, heard the chase winging back toward him. For the first time that morning he laughed, knowing that it was Jonah who had got the fox out of there. Turning Tippet, he raced to the right, took a rail fence lightly, and halted the mare.

They were close now. He squinted through the sparse pines. He saw the fox dart past a hundred feet from him and he lifted his voice in the wild, reverberating cry of the foxhunter. And there came the dogs. No, *a* dog. Old Jonah. Not even Judy was close to him now, for that morning Jonah was very, very hot. He was running the race of his life, as Tod had known he would. You could count on Jonah; he never failed you.

With something that might have been a sob breaking from him, Tod wheeled Tippet and rode hell-for-leather after the crying hounds. "Go it, Jonah, go it!" he was shouting, without even knowing that he spoke.

THE chase swept on. Ahead of them, Tod knew, lay that patch of Scotch broom. Could they make the kill before the fox reached it? Once there, the fox could laugh at them, for the brush was so thick a dog had to slow almost to a walk to force his way through.

That fox had a mighty shaky feeling as he skimmed on. He didn't like the sound of that dog so close behind him. The best way, he knew, was to skirt the field that lay just in front of the Scotch broom, skirt it by whipping to the left through tall pines. But that dog was so close. This time, depending on speed alone, he would have to draw the straightest line between two points and cross that open field. He didn't want to do it—but he had to.

The field was a quarter of a mile wide. Tod broke into it at a dead run. He saw the fox halfway across, running so fast that it seemed he flew. Just behind him thundered Jonah. Forty yards back were the other hounds. A groan went out of Tod. Gallant old Jonah would never in this world make it. He lost a little, he gained it back, he lost again. Tod groaned a second time and lifted his voice for one last savage cry.

And it seemed as if that cry lifted Jonah off his feet. He seemed to fly now. He was at that fox's heels. Tod yelled. Jonah made his leap, and there in the very shadow of the Scotch broom wilderness Tod saw dog and fox go over and over and knew that Jonah's teeth had fastened in a hold that would not be broken.

The last hunt! He was riding home now, with the dead fox, veteran of many and many a heart-stopping chase, suspended from his saddle horn. The hounds were strung out behind him, Jonah slightly in the van, as befitted his position of pack leader. He wouldn't look at Jonah, maybe he couldn't.

Deputy Sheriff Cray was waiting impatiently for him. Tod brushed aside his impatience with a wave of his hand. Then, moving as if in a dream, he stabled and fed the mare, kenneled and fed the dogs, and climbed the steps to his front porch where Cray had waited for him.

"YOU ready?" Cray asked.

"No, Sam." There was a long space between the words. "No, Sam, I'm not ready. Jonah didn't do that killing."

"The Barretts saw him."

"Sam, Jonah's not the only black-and-white-spotted dog in this county. They could have—"

"They know him well enough to recognize him, Tod."

"And they hate me enough to—"

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"Let's don't have any of that," Cray said gently.

Something snapped in Tod then. He lunged to his feet. "Sam, you're not killing my dog."

"Tod, I am killing him."

What was the matter with him? Had he gone crazy? He was standing there cursing Sam Cray, cursing the Barretts. He was daring Sam Cray to touch his dog. Cray was standing, too, his face pale.

"What're you going to do, Tod?"

"I'm going to shoot the first man that—"

"Tod, don't you realize what you're saying? You crazy or something? Get aholt of yourself. Man, you'll disgrace all the foxhunters in the world."

"I don't give a—" And then he did realize what he was saying and his head dropped. Yes, a disgrace to every man who rode to hounds. Lifting his head, he stared miserably at the deputy.

"That's better," said Cray, gently again. "I hate it like hell myself, Tod. I want you to know that."

"He's only a dog," Tod said dully. "Just a dog, with no show to prove he's innocent." Something vibrated in him then. "Sam, when a man's charged with a crime he gets a chance to—he gets a trial."

"What're you driving at?"

"Jonah's going to get a trial, too. Crank up your car. I'll go get Jonah. We'll drive over to Barrett's."

"But—"

"Don't go 'butting' at me. Crank up your car."

They went to the Barrett house. Tod asked where were the dead sheep and the Barretts said they had not yet been removed from the field. Then Tod, with a curt command that everybody follow, went stalking toward the Barrett back pasture, old Jonah treading sedately at his side, picking his way gravely as befitted one of dignity and wisdom.

Fifty feet from the three huddled sheep Tod halted.

"Every man of you knows fox dogs. You know that an old dependable hound, if he does kill a sheep, will cringe if you bring him back to the scene, the same way a bird dog does when he chases a rabbit and you bring him back to where the rabbit got up."

"I ain't so sure about that," Cam Barrett said.

"I'm sure about it, 'specially with Jonah. Now watch."

WITH the other three men silently following, he led the way to the dead sheep. Jonah went forward and sniffed at each carcass. Tod watched him intently. Jonah finally moved off a pace or two and dropped to his haunches.

"Come here!" Tod snapped.

Jonah walked to his side. Tod pointed at the sheep. He scolded the old dog in a way that hurt his own heart.

"You Jonah! What you been doing? Look-a-there. Ain't you 'shamed? You Jonah, you!"

The old dog looked up, but there was no guilt in his eyes, no cringe in his stance.

"Gentlemen, my dog's innocent."

"The hell he is," said Lige Barrett.

"What do you say, Sam?"

"Tod, I—I will admit he don't act guilty, but—well, Mr. Barrett and the boys, they saw him."

"You fools," Tod said, "can't you tell when a dog's—"

"It ain't proof," Cray said. "You ain't got real evidence to stand on. Mr. Barrett and the boys have. They say they *know* it was your dog. I'll have to kill him, Tod."

Tod's hand dropped back to his hip pocket.

"Tod Carter," Cray said, "look out what you're doing. If that's a gun you got your hand on—"

"You ain't killing my dog yet," Tod said. He was fighting for time, his mind wrestling for some way in which to save Jonah. The deputy's tone told him that the dog was doomed. But Tod fought on, and at last found something to stand on. "Listen. I'll do this. I'll take— Listen. All of you know that once a hound gets a

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taste of sheep killing he always comes back for more. He'll come back more'n likely the very next night."

"That's right," Cray admitted.

"Well, I'll do this. I'll leave Jonah out again tonight. We'll all come back here and hide near the sheep. If it's Jonah that comes back, I'll shoot him myself."

"What kind of foolishness is this?" Lige asked angrily.

Tod ignored him. "You owe that much to me, Sam," he said. "Give the dog a show."

"I—well, I—"

"Sam," Tod said softly, "I know the old dog's innocent. If you can prove him guilty, he's yours to shoot. But until you give him his show—well, you'll have to shoot me along with him."

There are some times when a man knows another man means exactly what he says, times when there is not the slightest shadow of doubt. This happened to be one of those times. Deputy Sheriff Cray felt a shiver hurry along his spine. To hide his confusion, he said loudly: "That's fair enough. Lige, Tod's so sure his dog's innocent we got to give him a chance. Now don't go jabbering at me. I'm the law right now and I say we do like Tod Carter says."

"Well, I for one want to know he don't tie his dog up tonight," Lige said.

"I'll let Cray see about that," Tod said serenely.

CRAY did see about it. At nine o'clock he returned to the Carter place. Tod waited for him on the porch. Jonah was dozing at the foot of the steps. Tod whispered: "Drive your car back down the road to Taylor's gate. I'll slip out the back way and meet you there."

Cray returned to his car, drove off. Tod went into the house. When he eased out the back door he carried his .30-30 rifle. Taking a short cut across his alfalfa field, he met Cray at the designated spot. They drove swiftly to Barrett's.

A half moon loitered in the sky. A whippoorwill called far away. A "hootin'" owl sailed low over the field. The Barrett sheep grazed peacefully along the rail fence that separated their pasture from the pine woods beyond.

In a small depression crouched Tod, the deputy and the three Barretts, with the moonlight caressing the gleaming barrel of Tod Carter's rifle.

The moon rode on. The minutes passed. Lige Barrett grunted in contempt. His two sons whispered together. Deputy Cray muttered now and again to Lige. Only Tod was silent, his eyes peering ceaselessly into the faintly illumined night.

Once a ewe bleated and the whole flock moved nervously. Tod slid a little forward, his finger upon the trigger of the rifle. But nothing further happened. Tod relaxed.

After ages Sam Cray said: "Moon's going down."

"Still light enough, though, to shoot a dog," said Lige.

And then the thing happened. Tod Carter saw a black-and-white-spotted dog leap the rail fence, skim gracefully over it. A big dog—a very big Walker foxhound. His heart stopped then, and beat afterward like a hammer.

He slid forward once more, just as the hound charged the sheep.

The rifle came up. He was conscious that behind him all three men held their breath. He looked down the barrel of the rifle. The sheep were bleating and running now. Over the rifle sights he saw old Jonah, on the crest of the slope above him, silhouetted against the sky, a stark awful figure against the gray-black of the night sky. At that moment he was curiously strong, remarkably steady. His hands did not so much as quiver. He merely sighted down the long barrel, caught the dog for a final time over the sights, and squeezed the trigger.

"Good-by, old dog," he said.

Then he rose to his feet and walked steadily toward the still shape of the black-and-white dog. Behind him he heard Sam Cray. "Some shot." The Barretts were whispering to themselves, triumphantly. He paid them no attention.

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He approached the dead dog, and the universe reeled. It was a black-and-white-spotted dog—but not Jonah!

Sam Cray sprang forward. "Damn! Why—why, this must be the hound old man Coe lost last month. I reckon—I reckon he just went sort of wild."

There was confusion now. He stood a little apart, wishing with all his might that the Barretts would start something. He was ready for them. Just one little word, and he would go into action. But old Lige did a curious thing. He came forward shyly, his hand half extended.

"Tod, I'm sorry. I would of swore—But, hell, you thought it was Jonah, too, when he popped over that fence."

And Tod realized that this was true.

"I guess you ain't a liar after all," said Cam Barrett.

Tod had to think hard, think back to that day two years ago, before he knew what Cam meant. He felt queer now. He would never, of course, be intimate with the Barretts—they weren't his kind—but he could at least let bygones be bygones and shake hands all around.

"Well, good night," said Deputy Cray.

"It ain't good night with you and me yet," Tod said. "You're going to take me in that car of yours and break all speed records between here and my place—because I want to shake hands with my old Jonah dog."

THE END

## *Deadly South Sea Fish*

A VERY old and as yet unsolved mystery of the South Sea islands is the strange phenomenon of edible fish which suddenly turn poisonous, killing the natives who eat them. The haamea fish is the chief trouble maker.

These fish are delicious for eating and are found to be perfectly safe when caught along most shores of South Sea islands. But, as was recently the case at Papeete, Tahiti, suddenly, for no reason apparent to the natives, these strange fish will become poisonous, killing immediately all who eat them. To the eye and to the taste there is no apparent difference between the safe or good fish and the poisonous.

Throughout the islands this is found among various species of fish. Perfectly wholesome and edible in some sections, these same fish, when caught in waters of a neighboring island, will be poisonous. The natives usually know by experience the safe and the dangerous fishing zones, but they occasionally make mistakes, as shown by the recent deaths.

—*J. T. Champion.*


### Of Interest to You!

WHAT do you consider the best story (of any length) published in ARGOSY since June 1, 1935? For the twelve post cards or letters from readers which name the best reasons why this or that story stands out above all others the magazine will give twelve full, yearly subscriptions. Literary style or skill will not count, for what the editors want to know is exactly what stories readers like best, and *why*.

Letters selected will be published from week to week, but *not all letters published will be rewarded with subscriptions*.

Your letter must reach us not later than January 1, 1936. Address it to The Editor, ARGOSY Magazine, 280 Broadway, New York City.


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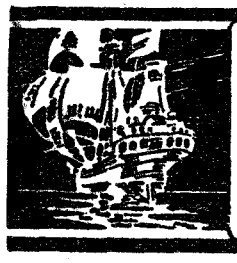

# Argonotes

## The Readers' Viewpoint

COULD he be a Munitions Maker, this reader who prefers to remain anonymous, and signs himself merely—

### A. WAR-FIST

Today being Tut. 1, 1652, according to the Ethiopian calendar, and hence New Year's Day for Haile Selassie, might I suggest that you send him cable greetings along these lines:

HAPPY NEW YEAR. AM SENDING GUARANTEED PROTECTION AGAINST WAR. DO NOTHING TILL ROSCOE ARRIVES.

ARGOSY.

Demand from your new-made friends the pacifists that for once they either put or shut (though they will certainly do nothing). Then, since you sponsor Roscoe (himself a real "Son-of-a-gun"—see the dictionary of slang) send him full speed to Addis Ababa with a copy of "War Declared!"

Once on the spot, he can put this story in Haile's hands, and then the Lion cannot fail to appreciate how logical the whole thing is, and will be glad to be led by Roscoe, the hand maidens, the flower bearers, the musicians, etc. Selassie no longer need have any fear of Mussolini or his legions.

Don't mention it! No thanks are expected for my humble efforts. For fear, however, that you may insist on sending them, I simply subscribe myself as being—A. War-Fist.

N. B.—Let Roscoe beware, pending his departure, for a number of midgets have been seen in and around Times Square of late. The little ones claim they are merely actors looking for jobs and grub, but I very much fear they are the heads of the Munition Makers' Trust, who, as Roscoe knows, are alone responsible for all wars. —A. W.

A READER who likes our covers:

### ERNEST GOETZ

I wish to express my appreciation for the high standard of the cover illustrations that ARGOSY now publishes. The illustration appearing on the June 29th issue, for "The Marines Having Landed," was especially fine.

Brooklyn, N. Y.

DIAMONDS, paid for by words from

### JACK H. FOSTER

In my opinion, the best ARGOSY story since June 1st, 1935, is Theodore Roscoe's "Munum-guru."

As a janitor, I live a humdrum sort of existence. My entire life is made up of undecorated, monotonous normalities; and consequently any small happening, an exciting movie, or a story containing the abnormal, the subnormal, unusual or the eerie appeals to me very much. Therein lies the reason for my choice of "Munum-guru." It impressed me deeply—and I mean *impressed*, not just *interested*.

Though a stay-at-home actually ("financial coercion") with ARGOSY and its authors, I have batted about all over the world under all kinds of conditions, and through almost every possible kind of experience, physical and mental. To them alone I owe my brightest, most interesting and enjoyable hours; the diamonds in this drab clay of daily monotony.

Words are poor pay for those diamonds, yet I can offer you only my sincerest "Thank you!"

Merchantville, N. J.

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KEVIN JOHNSON

*COMING TO YOU IN NEXT WEEK'S ARGOSY—NOVEMBER 23*


**Statement of the ownership, management, etc., of ARGOSY, published weekly at New York, N. Y., for October 1, 1935. Required by by the Act of Congress of March 3, 1933.**

State of NEW YORK } ss.:
County of NEW YORK }

Before me, a Notary Public, in and for the State and County aforesaid, personally appeared WILLIAM T. DEWART, who, having been duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that he is the President of the Frank A. Munsey Company, publisher of ARGOSY, and that the following is, to the best of his knowledge and belief, a true statement of the ownership, management, etc., of the aforesaid publication for the date shown in the above caption, required by the Act of March 3, 1933, embodied in Section 537, Postal Laws and Regulations. To wit:

**That the names and addresses of the Publisher, Editor, Managing Editor, and Business Manager are:**

Publisher—**The Frank A. Munsey Company**, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Editor—None.

Managing Editor—**Albert J. Gibney**, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

Business Manager—**H. B. Ward**, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

**That the Owners are: (If a corporation give its name and the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 per cent or more of the total amount of stock.)**

**The Frank A. Munsey Company**, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

**C. W. H. Corporation**, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

**William T. Dewart**, 280 Broadway, New York, N. Y.

**That the known bondholders, mortgagees, and other security holders, owning or holding 1 per cent or more of total amount of bonds, mortgages, or other securities are:**

None.

That the two paragraphs next above, giving the names of the owners, stockholders, and security holders, if any, contain not only the list of stockholders and security holders as they appear upon the books of the company, but also, in cases where the stockholder or security holder appears upon the books of the company as trustee or in any other fiduciary relation, the name of the person or corporation for whom such trustee is acting is given; also that the said two paragraphs contain statements embracing affiant's full knowledge and belief as to the circumstances and conditions under which stockholders and security holders who do not appear upon the books of the company as trustees, hold stock and securities in a capacity other than that of a bona fide owner; and this affiant has no reason to believe that any other person, association or corporation has any interest direct or indirect in the said stock, bonds, or other securities than as so stated by him. WILLIAM T. DEWART, President.

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 1st day of October, 1935.

{SEAL} GEORGE H. BOLLWINKEL, Notary Public, Nassau County. Term expires March 30, 1937. Certificate filed in New York County No. 671. New York Register's No. 7B384.





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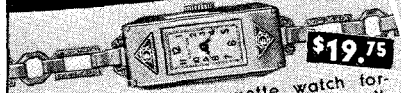


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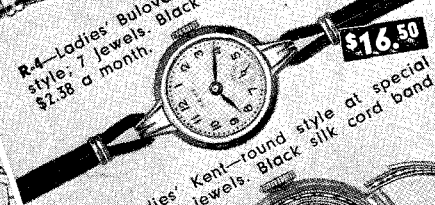


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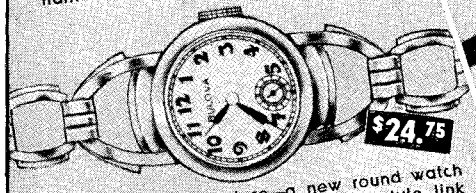


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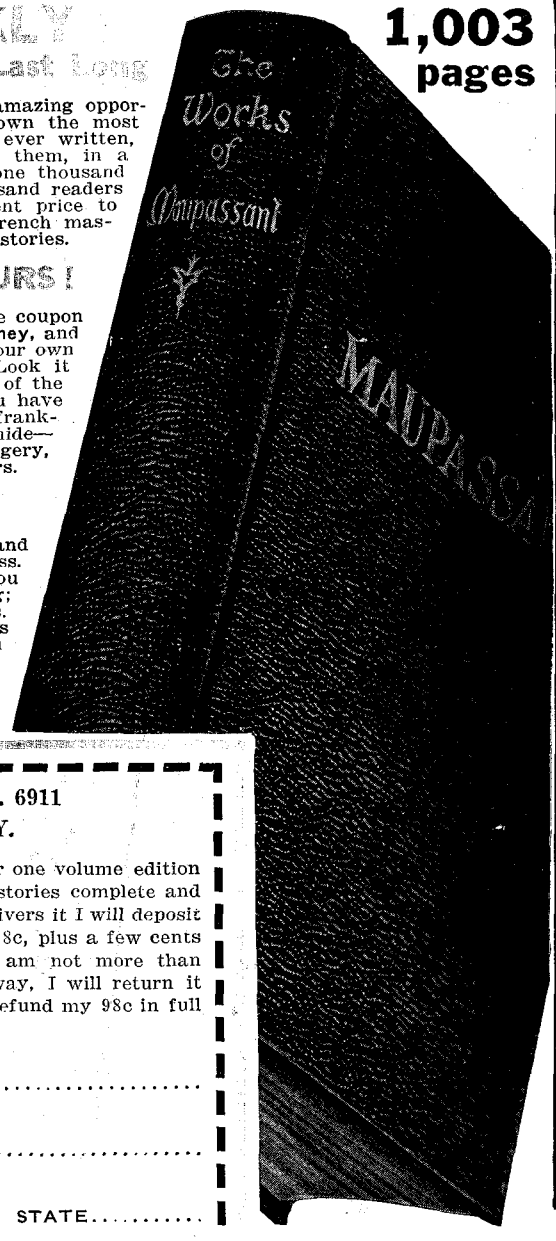


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